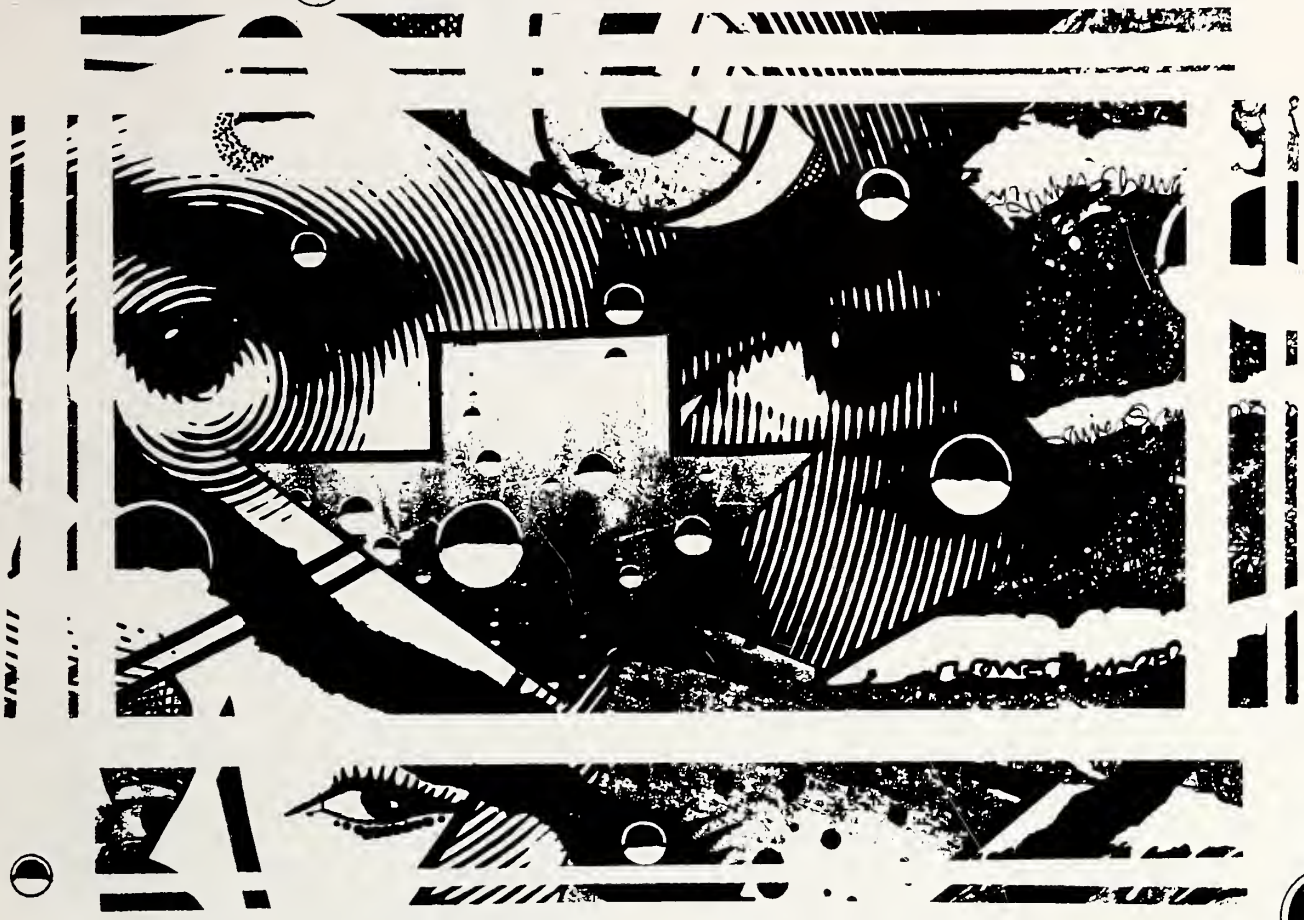

WORD EATER

84

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Manuscripts and cover designs must be submitted to
John Stobart , room C1069, by:
October 1, 1993 • Wordeater 85
November 29, 1993 • Wordeater 86

Manuscripts should be typed and will not be returned.

WORDEATER 84 STAFF:

Letitia Alvarado
Jim Goebel
Jennifer Jay
Mary Frances Lund
Tom Martin
Janine Passehl
Chris Savini

John Stobart, Advisor

For a selection to be published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the awards, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

Poetry— $5.00 each

Phil Antinori
Kathy Franke
Kathleen Jones
Mary Frances Lund
Janine Passehl

Prose— $5.00 each

Phil; Antinori
Kathy Franke
Kathleen Jones
Mark Moore
Shellie Smith

Cover Designs (front and back)— $20.00
Javier Chavira

Correction: back cover design award for Wordeater 83 went to Janine Passehl, not Shellie Smith

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. An Inquiry ..... Jim Goebel
2. Formula ..... Lil Pedersen
3. Racing Time ..... Kathy Franke
4. Dreams ..... Janine Passehl
5. He sat quietly... ..... Mark Moore
6. Three-fifths of a man ..... Phil Antinori
7. Skyscraper Eyes ..... Chris Bernal
8. Artistic Vision ..... Tara Challenger
9. Wearing Pain ..... Kathy Franke
10. Mazes of the Heart ..... Janine Passehl
11. Cameo Soaps and Lilacs ..... Kathy Jones
12. The Pulse ..... Phil Antinori
13. Neverschizmofrothumdader ..... Chris Bernal
14. A Problem ..... Jim Goebel
15. Happy Birthday ..... Kathy Franke
16. Memories of Yesterday ..... Janine Passehl
17. My Desires ..... Randi Chesko
18. Alphabet ..... Kathy Jones
19. Mourning ..... Janine Passehl
20. Letting Go ..... Mary Frances Lund
21. As Paul approached ..... Phil Antinori
22. Wendy Oh No No ..... Chris Bernal
23. Hearthole ..... Mary Frances Lund
24. Enough is Enough ..... Kathy Jones
25. Pictures of You ..... Janine Passehl
26. The Immigrants ..... Mary Juricic
27. Thinking ..... Tara Challenger
28. Salvation ..... Kathy Franke
29. In the Throne ..... Jim Goebel
30. A Mother's Prayer ..... Mary Juricic
31. A Prime Time ..... Jim Goebel
32. Family Business ..... Kathy Franke
33. I Am Watching You ..... Janine Passehl
34. Passing Thought ..... Rienna Sills
35. Speaking My Heart and Mind ..... Kathy Jones
36. As I Lie ..... Mark Moore
37. Body Heat ..... Mary Frances Lund
38. Friday Night ..... Shellie Smith
39. Sapphist ..... Phil Antinori
40. The Natural Struggle ..... Kathy Franke
41. This ..... Kathy Jones
42. Nightfall ..... Janine Passehl
43. Brace ..... Phil Antinori
44. untitled ..... Chris Bernal
45. Modern Music Mindwarp ..... Jim Goebel
46. The "W" Word ..... Mary Frances Lund
47. Darkness ..... Janine Passehl
48. D. Koresh ..... Jim Goebel
49. Disintigration ..... Joe Mendenhall
50. The Game ..... Heather Dubs
51. Origins ..... Shellie Smith
52. Life Under Glass ..... Phil Antinori
53. Time for a Change ..... Kathy Franke
54. All for Fun ..... Janine Passehl
55. A Letter ..... Jim Goebel
56. A Response ..... Jim Goebel
57. She leaned... ..... Shellie Smith
58. Another Letter ..... Jim Goebel
59. Lies ..... Janine Passehl
60. "Through the Looking Glass" ..... Lil Pedersen
61. Ego ..... Janine Passehl
62. Stories ..... Kathy Franke
63. Highway Haiku ..... Shellie Smith
64. The Loon ..... Martha Sayles
65. Lessons in Acting ..... Kathy Jones
66. Think ..... Janine Passehl
67. Black Gold ..... Mary Frances Lund
68. Star Gazer ..... Larry Hartding

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1. An Inquiry

Jim Goebel

Frederick Raymond Orville Greever -
1.0934 Integer Drive
Eleven, Tenn. 98765

Public Publicity Publishing People
4567 Purvis Place
Pittsburgh, PA 49635

Dear Sir,

Enclosed please find copies of my poems "Spittle, Splat," " Why Wally Wouldn't Wear His Wardrobe," " Whither, Flirzelkwerp?" and "Chili Con Carne in 4/4 Meter." The poems were previously submitted to such distinguished literary publications as The Wyoming Wonderer, The Pennsylvania Ponderer, The Irrational Desirer, and National Review. William F. Buckley, the editor from the latter magazine, had this to say about my writing: "Never before in the history of literature had I found anything worthy of lining my birdcage with. That is, until now."

I have never read a copy of your publications nor written for the guidelines of submitting poems to your publications. I hope this doesn't decrease my chances of getting published.

Sincerely,

Fred Greever

FROG/pppp
Enclosure

2. Formula for Teaching a Teenager to Drive

Lil Pedersen

Assemble the following: one aged automobile, well-dented and already on its last legs, one ambitious teenager equipped with proper driver's license permit, one anxious parent, and one parking lot or deserted street devoid of anything living or wishing to live. If parent is overanxious, then add a supply of tranquilizers or sedatives.

Begin by having the teenager sit in the driver's seat. This is done by opening the door and bending your six-foot-tall teenager like a pretzel to fit into your small economy car. Thus seated, the seatbelt may now be fastened in place and the key inserted into the ignition.

Let us start the engine by slowly turning the key. If this is done properly, the motor will grind loudly into life. It could, however, only turn the radio on, causing deafness in an ordinary person but not the typical teenager. If deafness has been avoided by being quick-witted enough to cover your ears, you may execute the next step. Ask the teenager to please turn down the radio, calmly explaining that in order to follow directions, you have to be able to hear them.

Placing the teenager's hands on the steering wheel in the 10 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions, you issue a stern warning to keep both hands on the wheel at all times. This does not allow for changing radio stations, waving to friends, or smoking cigarettes. These other activities may be done later when more driving experience has been gained and they're on their own!

Exercise great control in explaining the use of the gear shift. Each letter stands for a function of the car. For example, Park is not something you do on a date. Reverse is never used on the expressways. Low is not used to go under bridges or viaducts.

Now that you've explained these highly complex gears, you can focus on the proper procedures for using the brake and accelerator pedals by putting it in the simplest of terms--one is Go--one is Whoa. Getting the youth ready to leave the driveway by exerting as little fuss as possible is hard but can be done.

If your nerves start to fail you at this point, the tranquilizers that were recommended in the beginning should now be taken. Gently repeating the instructions for the use of gear shift and pedals and sending up a silent prayer for help, instruct the teenager to keep the right foot on the brake and gently ease the shift lever into reverse to back down the driveway.

If compelled to say something positive at this point, try complimenting the teen on avoiding hitting the garbage cans at the end of the driveway by clearly going sideways and backing over the lawn into the neighbor's fence. While everyone is rushing towards the car because of your neighbor's screams of outrage, you quietly sink to the floor hoping to become invisible.

The alternative method to the problem of teaching a teenager how to drive is now flashing bright neon signs into your mind---pay someone else!! This method enables you to get off the endangered species list with your skin intact and also keeps the neighbors from declaring war. In this case, you can pat yourself on the back, feeling you have done your civic duty by getting a professional to teach your teenager the importance of being a responsible driver. No one would ever believe that the calm self-contained adult rocking on the front porch was once a quivering mass of nerves. No one but the instructor from the driving school who is now pulling into the driveway popping tranquilizers into his mouth!!!

3. Racing Time

Kathy Franke

Racing toward our destination,
not in hurry to arrive.
Just trying to beat "father time"-
trying to maintain our youth.

The music hypnotized us
as the wind thruster sped into our souls
willing us to accelerate
and foolishly ignore safety.

Our laughter betrayed us
as it tricked us into the false illusion
that we were invincible
Only for it to be short lived

Suddenly the sight of familiar bodies
soaring through the air
replaced the feelings of freedom
with that of terror and confusion.

Our screams of horror shot through
the music-infested air
and even the wind paused, out of respect,
as we realized that time had won.

4. Dreams

Janine Passehl

dreams
woven like threads
constructed to
bind
can not imprison
these thoughts which
surpass
mere insanity
take me into a
realm
of
    terror and joy
    confusion
    delusion
knowing not
what
i truly
feel
i awaken
demons of reality
to find
    i am asleep

5. He sat quietly...

Mark Moore

He sat quietly and waited. Moisture from the damp ground had soaked into the seat and knees of his denim jeans, but he ignored it. The target was supposed to be arriving soon, according to all his information, and he couldn't afford to be distracted by minor inconveniences right now. Checking his watch, he decided the time was close enough and he slipped on the ex-Russian army issue night vision goggles. He grinned to himself as he did. He'd been able to pick up a lot of old military hardware for a song from the cash-poor Russian government. The goggles he now wore were one of only six pairs he'd purchased for eight hundred dollars apiece, compared to the four thousand each they would have cost from an American manufacturer. He had to laugh at that; the Russians had learned that old economic principle of undercutting the competition pretty quickly.

He glanced out at the target area again and had to adjust the intensity level on the goggles. He had set the goggles to the ambient light level of one hour ago, and the clouds which had obscured the nearly full moon had abated somewhat since. Glancing back, he decided he was satisfied with the image resolution and settled in to watch the area. The scene he was watching was pretty unremarkable, just a poorly maintained, pothole infested two lane road running through a handful of sparsely forested hills. He was sitting behind and to the side of one of those trees right now, leaning against the rough, storm battered bark. Clouds still blocked some of the moon's light, giving the whole tableau an unearthly white glow. He'd picked this tree because he'd observed the target stop his car at roughly this location once before, and this was one of the only areas on this road you could hold a meeting. Elsewhere along the way the shoulders were either too soft to park on or completely nonexistent, so any stopped cars would halt traffic, something a person experienced at such matters would try to avoid. Traffic here was minimal, but one always plans for contingencies.

Looking down the road a short distance, he noticed the warning glow of automobile headlamps creeping around the bend. A car appeared a short time later, still about a quarter mile away and moving slowly, bouncing up and down as the suspension struggled to cope with the uneven driving surface. Time for a last weapon check, he thought silently. First the pistol, a Glock 20 ten millimeter semi-auto with an underbarrel-mounted laser sight. He drew the pistol slowly, keeping his finger off the trigger, squeezing the tape switch affixed to the front of the handgrip. A tiny dot of light appeared in the field of view of the night-vision goggles, confirming the laser's proper operation. Grasping the serrated metal slide with his free left hand, he pulled back slowly, looking for the gentle glow of a chambered round's brass casing. Sure enough, the gun was loaded and ready to fire. Nice guns, these Glocks. No hammer to cock, no safety to check, just pull the trigger and everything was ready to rock and roll. Satisfied, he carefully reholstered the weapon and moved to the heavy shotgun at his feet. Compared to the high-tech, polymer-framed, laser-sighted Glock, the shotgun was a downright antique. Constructed entirely of steel and wood, the gun had a heavy, almost reassuring weight and heft. He partially cycled the walnut slide, saw the amplified light glint off the brass base of a three-inch-long magnum shotgun shell, and settled in to wait for the car to arrive.

He didn't have to wait long. Even at his perch a good fifteen yards away, he could hear the beleagured shock absorbers and car springs groaning in protest. This elicited his second grin of the night. I should write this down somewhere, he thought. Something

like "Security rule number forty-three: never attend a supposedly secret, clandestine meeting in a run-down '76 Chevy Nova that sounds like it's about to go into cardiac arrest." Not that he minded it when the other guy made mistakes like that, mind you; it was just that he had been dealing with amateurs for so long he was beginning to get bored.

Looking down to keep from being blinded as the car passed his perch, he looked up again when his ears told him the car had pulled past. Sure enough, the target had pulled over where he had predicted. The car slowed to a stop, then the driver shut off the lights and turned off the engine.

Dumb, his mind yelled. This target deserved whatever he got tonight, he mused. The guy obviously wasn't thinking about the possibility of a quick getaway and the seconds he could save. Oh well, those are the breaks, he thought silently as he brought the shotgun stock up against his shoulder but kept the barrel pointed down at the ground. Now, if the contact man would only arrive he could get this business over with and get some dry pants on. Carefully, he scanned the meeting area for anyone else approaching. With the grass around here damp but not soaked it would be hard to hear anyone, so his eyes would have to do most of the work tonight.

A few minutes later a shadow finally coalesced into the form of person on the other side of the road, some twenty-five yards past the car. Now this is more like it, he thought silently, an intelligent adversary at last. Didn't appear to be wearing night vision devices, so the delay was probably to allow his eyes to readjust to the dark after the car headlights cut out. Standard procedure but around here even the fundamentals of common sense were hard to find. But even acknowledging that this one might have some brains, his goggles still gave him the edge. Soon now, he thought, and it would be all over.

The target finally left the car and stood next to the driver's side door, waiting for the shadow to arrive. The second figure grew closer, then stopped about five feet away. The two figures faced each other but were speaking too softly to hear anything intelligible at this distance. No matter. The proof would be visual, not audible. The discussion appeared to end and the figure originally on foot reached inside a coat and handed over a large thick envelope to the target. The target in turn pulled something out of a pant pocket and started to hand it over to the second figure.

Now, he observed calmly. In a single fluid motion his left hand brought the shotgun up, pointed it at the target, and braced against the tree he was using for concealment. His right thumb flicked up the safety switch, moving it up from the "on safe" position to "fire." Returning his thumb to its original position, his index finger began to squeeze the smooth brass trigger. Fine details and shadows all around him seemed to jump out as if under magnification as his brain started releasing adrenaline and other hormones in anticipation of battle. His breathing and heartbeat were normal, almost quiet, but everything within his field of vision seemed sharper and clearer. The boom of a shotgun blast which would normally have deafened his unprotected ears and shoved his shooting arm like a kick from an angry mule crashed across the landscape, but in his combat awareness seemed like no more than a wet firecracker. He didn't know exactly what had happened to the two figures but saw that both appeared standing. Almost of its own accord his arm cycled the shotgun slide, chambering a new round.

BLAM! the shotgun cried, and again and again until suddenly all was quiet once more. Glancing down, he realized why. In the heat of combat he'd just kept firing until he'd emptied the short ammunition magazine, and the hammer was now falling on an empty chamber. Glancing up, he saw that both figures were gone. He also saw a black mound

on the left of the car next to the driver's door, which looked to be at least one of his intended victims.

Not wishing to take the time to slowly manually reload the shotgun, he dropped it on the soft ground. He drew his pistol from the nylon shoulder holster and brought it up in front of him, wrapped his left hand solidly around his right, arms outstretched. Keeping the gun trained on the shapeless form next to the car, he began moving toward the car in a low crouch, head glancing left and right for any previously unseen assailant. He moved up behind the car, using it for cover while he pointed the gun around the rear fender and glanced around the area. Closer now, he could see the bodies of both victims, one right here next to the car, the other face down a few feet away. The evil dot of the Glock's laser sight swept over the scene for a few moments. No movement, no visible signs of life; apparent success. Moving around the car, he brought his left hand down for a moment to examine the first body for any signs of life but found none. This had been the primary target and had taken several double-ought buckshot pellets, one of which appeared to have hit the head. The scorekeeper in him catalogued the event: Target One neutralized. Moving to the next body, he made sure he could see both hands, then kicked it over with his foot. It rolled over and fell heavily, landing with a muffled thud on the wet ground, one arm draped across its chest. Startled, he blinked briefly in surprise. This one wasn't dead yet, but very close. He could see this one's eyes wide open in shock as the mouth moved soundlessly, trying to make some kind of noise past the frothy pink blood now building up in its mouth, the result of a pellet that had hit its throat.

He brought the tiny laser dot to rest on the brow of the half-dead thing before him. Another gentle squeeze on the trigger and the sharp loud bark of a ten-millimeter shell was added to the evening's din. Reholstering the pistol, he walked to where he heard the brass shell casing bounce off the car behind and to his right. Examining the ground carefully, he found it after only a cursory examination. He tossed the casing from hand to hand until convinced it wouldn't burn his jacket, then pocketed the tiny lump of metal. Walking back down the road the way he had come, he removed the goggles. He squinted once or twice, trying to help readjust his eyes, then continued walking. He zipped his jacket halfway up, then stuffed the goggles inside to avoid carrying them. Stripping off the tight leather gloves he'd worn all evening, he dropped them on top of the big hunting shotgun as he walked back down the road. Now finished with his job for the time being, he unclipped a small cellular phone from his belt and began dialing the number he'd been given prior to the assignment. It rang four times, then an answering machine picked up. While he was waiting for the beep, he ran over the pre-arranged verbal codes in his head one last time. At the tone, he delivered his message.

"This is Richard, the night cleaning person. I cleaned up the mess you told me about. I used up all the cleaning fluid you gave me and some extra stuff I brought just in case of emergencies. I took care of the stuff I brought, but the day cleaning crew can take care of the equipment and things you provided. Everything looked good, and I don't anticipate any further problems. See you tomorrow to pick up my paycheck. Bye."

Inhaling deeply, he took a breath of the cool, damp night air. He walked back to where his car was parked, some two miles away and well back from the road. He didn't mind though. After all, he thought as he looked around at the landscape, it's a beautiful night for a walk. Tomorrow he could go into the office and give his employer the full report: the formula for Coke Classic was still a secret.

6. Three/Fifths of a Man

Philip Antinori

Fathom the depths of an odd human plan.
Our forefathers brought laden ships of slaves.
Harbor the thought of three/fifths of a man.(1)

The chattle was the dark hulled African.
A cargo of humanity on waves.
Fathom the depths of an odd human plan.

Melanin of nature, their wend began;
Anchored through America's Constitution
Harbor the thought of three/fifths of a man.

Chicaned and coerced, they crossed the ocean's span.
Sailing the briny into destitution.
Fathom the depths of an odd human plan.

Crammed in a ketch like sardines in a can.
Bartered, beaten, bane to their ancestry.
Harbor the thought of three/fifths of a man.

Deck slave to proud African-American,
Their race still rails against gales of bigotry.
Fathom the depths of an odd human plan.
Abhor the thought of three/fifths of a man.

(1) The original U.S.Constitution considered a slave to be three/fifths of a person.

7. Skyscraper Eyes

Chris Bernal

just movement
moving
muscles mesh
pervert features
stilly in the night

it's a still
city

crossbars stress tight
deserve the preservation
of skin
suave looks
deep indigo pupil
purple cloud
matter

sky scraper
eyes

8. Artistic Vision

Tara Challenger

The eyes create a vivid portrait,
of who a person is.
They are the final piece of artwork,
that furnish the face and make it complete.
Inframed at the corners with a smile,
they draw you inward, using various expressions as media
to define the moods which they portray.
The contour of lines are drawn in a distinct manner,
to show character.
The brushstrokes of color are painted on delicately
to reveal feeling.
The style and fashion which they are carefully sculpted,
communicates a language without words.
But how this picture is interpreted,
depends on the artist who exhibits them.

9.Wearing Pain

Kathy Franke

I saw their pain again today.
It was clinging to the dark circles
under their eyes and when they sighed their
exhaled breath whispered,
"I'm suffocating."
Their giddy laughter hinted quietly
that it had been called out of retirement
for a special undercover job.
While their bright-colored clothes set off their
puddle-grey complexion.
Lacking any words of encouragement,
I offered my experience but no one noticed
because they were too busy acting nonchalant.

10. Mazes of the Heart

Janine Passehl

i am lost in the
labyrinth of your soul
following a path to nowhere and
fearing what lies beyond
each corner
knowing all the while that
i don't really want to
escape.

11. Cameo Soaps and Lilacs

Kathleen Jones

Led by the foreboding black hearse, the mile-long funeral procession slowly snaked its way through the cemetery, churning up the gravel road and making noise on a sacred ground where sound was out of place.

I stood far off, watching this and feeling no relevant emotion as the icy drops of rain found their way through the dark canopy of trees to splatter on the wide brim of my new black hat. I once heard someone say that it always rains when a loved one dies. If that were true, then everyday would be accented by a downpour. I leaned my head back for a moment, raising a hand to my hat to keep it on over my flaxen hair. Rain pelted my face, running down my flushed cheeks and chin. I lowered my gaze once again to concentrate on the procession as it stopped, the hearse pulling up next to a mound of freshly turned earth that was covered in tacky green tarp.

I knew people would ask me why I hadn't ridden with my parents in the procession. They would ask me why I had, instead, driven my own wheezing car to the cemetery ten minutes before everyone else, and why I had parked so far off. I didn't have one of my usual patented answers. I had an opinion that maybe if I stood far away and didn't make myself a part of the morbid traditions, then it wouldn't be real. That if I didn't choose to take part, then maybe my Aunt Mimmie would still be alive.

I knew what my Aunt Mimmie would do. I could almost see her standing there, next to her own grave and peering down at the mahogany casket through a thin, black meshed veil. She'd be wearing her funeral dress. The slender black wool dress buttoned tightly up to her wrinkled neck, the way she always wore it. She'd also have on her short black cotton gloves. "A lady must always wear gloves," Aunt Mimmie often said to me, in perfect diction. She had to speak that way. She was being a good example to me. She wanted me to grow up to be a perfect lady, although I don't believe even Mimmie herself was a perfect lady.

With a choked sigh, I pushed the remembrances from my mind and tried to watch as the pastor spoke to the people under an imposing blue tent. He knew Aunt Mimmie well. Aunt Mimmie attended church every week, and she always sat in the front pew. The pastor was reliving these memories now as he held out his Bible and waved it in the faces of my family. He didn't know it, but that was a solid representation of Mimmie in itself.

I turned from the sight, unable to watch any longer. It was starting to become real, and I didn't want anything to do with that. I climbed into my cramped Ford and started it up, hoping that I wasn't disturbing Aunt Mimmie's burial even though I knew I was.

A while later I ended up at the banquet that was being held in Mimmie's memory. As I walked in the door, I could feel the eyes of my family and friends watching me closely. Trying my best to ignore this, I pulled off my rain-wet faded blue parka and hung it up on the racks near the door. I could hear the questions they would ask before they even asked them. Why was I so late? Why hadn't I been in the procession?

As I passed the table where my cousins sat, I could hear someone whisper, "There's poor Emma. She was so close to Mimmie."

Yes, I was very close to Aunt Mimmie. She wasn't really my aunt. She was my great-aunt, my grandmother's sister. She was the only one left after my grandmother died. Gram died ten years ago of what Mimmie called "The Disease." I later found out that The Disease was cancer, an illness that would later claim Mimmie.

I nearly grew up at Mimmie's house. I could remember every Saturday I would scramble out of bed and run downstairs to the

kitchen to meet Mimmie as she set out the ingredients to make cookies. Mimmie and I made the best cookies, and I always looked forward to being able to test-taste the first one that came out of the oven. I'd sit at Mimmie's tall oak table and take the golden cookie from the tray, turning it quickly in my awkward fingers so I wouldn't burn them. Then Mimmie would pour me a fresh glass of very cold milk to dunk the cookie in as my mother would join us at the table, yawning and rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Emma, dear child," Mimmie would sit down beside me and pat my arm with her soft, wrinkled hand. "You must be sure to drink plenty of whole milk. It will give you pretty teeth and hair, just like your mother." She would turn to wink at me, then at my mother, as if it were a secret shared among only the three of us.

I never questioned Mimmie. I took her word as law and being only eight years old, that was easy to do. When I was that age, I would look at my mother and believe that she had been drinking milk, and lots of it, for a very long time. But as I grew older, I began to wonder if maybe Mother had not consumed as much milk as she should've. Mimmie always said that all women grew up to be either pretty or practical, and I discovered for myself that my mother was incredibly practical.

"Thank you," I said to the server at the buffet line as she handed me a glass of milk. I looked down into the cold whiteness and saw a reflection of myself. It nearly shocked me to see myself looking so drawn. I guess I had disappointed Mimmie by becoming practical. I didn't like milk all that much anymore, mostly because I'd drunk so much of it as a child. But I lifted the amber-colored glass to my lips and took a sip anyway, maybe out of reverence to my Aunt Mimmie.

The banquet seemed to be going well, if you could say such a thing about a funeral banquet. I found a seat over in the far corner of the room and sat down, easing myself into the wooden hard-backed chair. It was immediately uncomfortable, but I stayed there anyway, holding the milk steadily in my right hand and wishing I had a fresh-baked cookie that would nearly burn my fingers.

"Emma." A voice came to me somewhere from the right. I looked up and saw my cousin Draya pulling a chair over next to me so that she could sit down. "How are you, Emma?"

I stared blankly into Draya's blue eyes that were filled with an unconvincing concern. If anyone there at the banquet were to understand how I felt, it would be Draya. She had often come and joined me at Mimmie's house to play. But from the unaffected expression in Draya's eyes, I could tell that no one there was going to understand. Surprisingly, I wasn't bothered by this. I guess I just expected that no one would be able to relate to what I was going through.

Even though there was such a vast generational gap between Mimmie and I, she never failed to understand me. As a child, I knew I could always climb up into Mimmie's comfortable lap and whisper all my little-girl concerns in her ear. Mimmie would nod and hug me, and I would be lost in the sweet scents of her cameo soaps and lilac perfume. She would kiss my cheek with her smooth, pale lips and murmur in my ear. She always told me stories of her own childhood and the good memories she had from grammar school and chasing boys in the school yard. She'd relive the nights she spent courting her husband, Albert, and then she'd sadly tell me of the day he died when he got struck by a train. At that point in the story, I'd wipe away Mimmie's tears and kiss her rosy cheek as she'd stroke my hair and somehow convey in those simple actions that she really understood me. I only hoped that I let her know that I understood her as well.

"Emma?" Draya looked at me strangely, as if I'd physically drifted off as

well as mentally.

"You wouldn't understand," I told Draya. I must've said it harshly because Draya acted taken aback as she slowly stood up. Pushing the chair against the wall next to me, she just shrugged.

"Well...okay." Not being a great conversationalist, Draya just turned and walked away. I watched her go, then I lowered my gaze back to the glass of milk as it rested on my knee. My other hand was clenched tightly in a fist and as I uncurled it, I realized how very sweaty it was. As I wiped my palm on my black cotton skirt and left a noticeably wet spot, I deeply wished I'd worn my cotton gloves.

When Mimmie started to get sick, I noticed that she tried very hard to ignore what was happening. She was often deeply fatigued, and she ran out of energy so much faster than before. It frustrated her more than anything else. When I'd visit her on weekends, I'd spend a lot of time doing things for her that she couldn't do for herself. In spring, I planted mums and buttercups in the wide bed of dirt in front of her wooden porch. Mimmie loved the flowers. When I was little, I loved watching her plant them. She'd kneel in the fresh dirt and hum "Blessed Assurance" as she dug up the earth and set flowers gently in the holes she'd made. I would stand nearby and squish my toes in the dirt. That was my favorite activity outdoors at Mimmie's; I loved the feeling of the dirt between my toes.

I felt at that moment as if I didn't have control of my own body and mind. I leaned forward and set the milk glass on the floor, leaving two-thirds of it behind. I stood up on shaky feet and walked around several tables to get back to the door, wringing my hands as I went and ignoring the voices of my relatives as they called to me, beckoning me to come back. Instead, I grabbed my parka one again and draped it around my shoulders as I left.

Towards the end, when Mimmie was too ill to even be at home, I took my treasured copies of Heidi and Little Women to read to Mimmie as she lay, immobile, in her hospital bed. Mimmie had given me those books, and now the leather-bound novels were becoming worn after being read so much. But Mimmie appreciated it; she would smile approvingly at me through her pain as I read aloud from the exciting stories. She loved Heidi and all her antics. She said that hearing about Heidi reminded her of me when I was small, and then she'd ask me to read more and more, and I would until I was scarcely able to talk. And at the end of Mimmie's life, she was also unable to talk. I just slid my hand into hers and held it, nearly feeling the life being drained from her body. Her hands were cold and hard, so much unlike what I was used to. I kissed Mimmie's cheeks, pausing first to wipe away her tears of pain. Then, when Mimmie closed her eyes for the last time, I leaned in and murmured in her ear to tell her that I understood. I understood how, but I didn't why. I knew Mimmie didn't understand why either, but it was something she had to do. Then I hummed "Blessed Assurance" as Mimmie's hand dropped from mine.

For some reason, I returned to the cemetery. My car now churned up the gravel as I traveled the narrow road that the procession had traveled hours ago. Parking the car in the middle of the path, I got out and stood there for a moment, wondering just what it was that I wanted to do. I let go of the car door and walked forward, keeping my eyes on the fresh mound of earth that covered Mimmie's grave. They'd placed her coffin in the ground now and covered the hole with the dirt. The tacky green tarp was gone as was the tent. It struck me how quickly they forgot what had happened here; as soon as the mourners were gone, the cemetery returned to normal as if a new body had not just been committed to the earth.

I reached the corner of the grave site, the very tips of my black flats treading on the

fresh dirt. The dirt was wet but not very muddy. It had stopped raining and now all I could feel was the cold wind as it wrapped around my body and chilled my pale skin.

"Mimmie?" I asked, as if she was going to sit up and answer me. Even though she wouldn't, somehow I knew that Mimmie could hear me. "Mimmie, I miss you."

I stood there and thought of all the things I'd ever learned from my Aunt Mimmie. I regretted not wearing my cotton gloves and apologized aloud because my dress wasn't buttoned to my chin. I told her that I was sorry for not drinking all of my milk...

I promised that when I had a little girl, I'd give her fresh-baked cookies and pour her tall glasses of cold milk. Then I'd tell her to always drink plenty of whole milk because it would give her pretty teeth and hair, just like her Aunt Mimmie.

And then, with thoughts of buttercups, mums, Cameo soaps and lilacs, I pulled off my shoes and squished my toes in the dirt.

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12. The Pulse

Philip Antinori

A product of nature or God's creation
From beginning of life to puberty
A child's heartbeat is pulse for a nation.

Children have a blind trust of adulation
Born in bondage or borne in liberty
A product of nature or God's creation

Lithe creatures bodied to adaptation
From blatant wealth to extreme poverty
A child's heartbeat is pulse for a nation.

The young's faith, at times, faces abrogation
As adults can behave with impropriety
A conduct of culture or man's creation

Struggle to survive knows limitation
War, famine, abortion, murder lack piety
A child's heartbeat is pulse for a nation.

The strong bear their young in adoration
While the weak will abuse their own in self-pity
A product of nature or God's creation
A child's heartbeat is pulse for a nation.

13. Neverschizmofrothumdader

Chris Bernal

I. If the grey cat smiles
(raises)
where the lilacs rust
(dust)
faith must
(trust)
raise
its head
with mighty thrusts

wood chip wind
upwind
lines talk lingo
of telephone livers
say me again
dare to extend
me
again
skills fever remnant
blame

II. Feather talk like angel murder
ripping insect nibble bitter
scour shimmer second look
people wriggle 'neath the brook

nervous flower smoking hut
grimmace flu like starving soot
never brought this hasty fellow
stale meat fat brittle yellow

those are quick to smile right
tremble cheek of stern ignite
and glo-vision trees end memory
nestle fester the fading sea

14. A Problem

Jim Goebel

I asked her a question, and I wondered if I offended her. After all, it wasn't any of my business. I probably should apologize. If I don't, she may end up thinking that I have feelings for her. Do I have feelings for her? Well, yes I do, but I can't let her know lest she becomes offended, but she could still be offended by the question I asked, and not at me. There again, if she gets offended at the question I asked, will she get offended at me and not have any feelings for me afterwards?

Then again, this is just based on the speculation that she has feelings for me. If she doesn't have feelings for me, she could become offended at the question I asked and totally hate my guts for the rest of eternity, but how can I know? Dang, I forgot what I even asked her to cause her to possibly-get-offended-and-forget-all-the-feelings-she-had-for-me-if-she-even-had-any-in-the-first-place...

Of course I could always bail out totally and flee to Death Valley.

15. Happy Birthday

Kathy Franke

I sat in the window sill looking out into the branches of the towering tree that shaded our yard. The summer sun sliced through the thick leaves of our trees in an effort to reach the flower garden below. I often came to this spot to get away from my mom and her insane cleaning demands. It was so peaceful here, and I could wallow in my imagination. Today was different though, and my daydreaming was interrupted with occasional slips into memories of how things used to be.

"Kelly!" My mother's sharp voice broke through my subconscious state. "Where are you? You are supposed to be helping me!"

"I'm coming!" I yelled out, hoping to gain a few more moments in my sanctuary. From years of practice I had learned that the best way to procrastinate with Mother was to make her think that you were coming and then buy your time. You had to be careful not to stretch it out too far though, otherwise when she realized that you were wasting time, she would really lose it.

I sat perfectly still, not willing any part of me to move and wishing I could get back into the daydream out of which I had been abruptly snatched. But I knew I did not have the time to complete the dream so I let it lie in hibernation and finally began to move slowly. But suddenly I heard our stairs creak and realized my mother was on her way up to my room and marveled at how quickly I moved to stand over my bed. It always amazed me how fast a person could move when in danger. Conveniently my clothes were still strung through my room from my indecisiveness the night before when I couldn't find anything to wear, and they served as great props as I attempted to look busy.

Mom pushed her head in through my half-closed door. "What are you doing? How many times do I have to tell you that I need your help?" she said with an edge in her voice.

Calmly I answered, "I'm just folding my clothes and picking up my room so that I can clean it with the rest of the upstairs. That is what you want me to do, isn't it?"

"Yes," she replied in haste and aggravation, "but next time tell me what you are going to do before you start. What if I had wanted you to do something else...?" I am not sure what else she said because I shut her out. I was tired of listening to her lectures and of all her attempts to control me. So I just nodded when she finished and went about my work. Finally she stepped out of the door frame but not without giving me a list of work to accomplish before noon.

I looked at the clock-10:32 it read. There was no way I could get all this work done before 12:00, at least not without rushing. I hated rushing, it seems so useless to run around and hurry to get everything done so that you could spend the afternoon just sitting around with nothing to do. However it really did not matter how I felt about the matter, my mother had demanded that the work be done by noon, therefore it must be done by 12:00.

I worked hard and finally finished the cleaning and washing by noon. We had a large house. I was the youngest of six kids but most of them had left home by now, which meant I was stuck with all the work. By the time I had successfully put away all my cleaning supplies, I was sticky and hungry. The summers in southern Illinois could get hot, and the humidity was overbearing today. I trudged down the stairs on a search for food and paused at the dining room door.

There on the table sat a large thick candle. It was one of those special birthday candles with the numbers on them for each year of your life until you turn 21. Each year on your birthday, you burn the candle down to the next number so it would be ready for

next year. This one was blue which stood for a boy, of course, and it was burned down to the number 15. No one in our family had forgotten that it was my brother's birthday, but it wasn't something we talked about very much anymore.

I walked into the room consciously as if I were walking into a sanctuary. I stared at the candle, practically willing the wick to light and burn the wax down to the next number. I couldn't distinctly remember the last time I had actually seen it glow with a flame. My older brother had died about 8 years ago, when I was 7 years old. Which meant that I was the same age he was when he died. The thought of that made me cringe, and I started to wonder again what it would be like to die.

My grandmother had always taught me that all humans come back to life again in another form and that form was dependent on what type of life you led, good or bad. I never really believed her, but my parents had become born-again Christians when my brother was 3 years old. They took me to Sunday School and taught about the God of the Bible and His son Jesus of Nazareth that died on a criminal's cross. They taught me about grace and eternal life. After Ted, my brother, died, I remember everyone had questions that no one could answer. But I watched my mom and dad, somehow they managed to find a peace in all of their pain. They seemed to draw comfort from their God, I think that was what kept the sane, and I believed that they had the answer.

"Did you finish your work?" I heard my mother ask in a low and soft voice. I jumped. I hadn't heard her walk into the room, and she was standing directly behind me.

"Yes," I stammered.

"Good," she replied.

Both of us were still staring at the candle transfixed. I heard her sigh and waited for her to say something. I knew she wanted to share something with me but she had a hard time putting her feelings into words, at least that was what my father said.

"Well, now that we are done, what do you say we get some lunch and relax," she finally said.

"Okay," I replied.

As we strolled out of the dining room my mother wrapped her arm around my waist. I watched as she fixed us sandwiches, and then she asked me if I would thank God for our food. When I had finished, we wandered into the living room and sat down to eat. After the food was gone, we just sat there doing nothing, as I had suspected. I could tell Mom was remembering Ted, and again I found myself hoping she would share her memories with me. Sometimes she would but for the most part she kept them to herself. It was as if they were safer locked up in her head because there was less chance of them being lost or defiled. I just sat and watched her.

Suddenly, I realized that Mom was not just sitting there doing nothing. Instead, she was reliving her few precious years when her son was alive. It made me wonder if she ever had these cleaning days with Ted or if they had originated because of his death. I started to see what drove Mom to work so hard and quickly and even felt a little honored that she wanted me to join her in her temple. This was like my window sill where I go to think and remember. Mom had created her own sanctuary in our living room, and she had invited me to attend a special service. I just wish I could have heard the pastor. But just the fact that I was alive and capable of sitting with my mother, even if we were not doing anything, had a new meaning today and I would never take it for granted again.

16. Memories of Yesterday

Janine Passehl

don't be a memory
remain with me in
the here and now of
today
forever
never looking
ahead or behind

yesterday is
gone.

17. My desires

Randi Chesko

My desires are nothing
to you,
Who broke
my fragile heart,
You didn't take the time
to know,
My love,
My dreams,
My passions,
Or the faith I could have had,
in you,
It's over now,
And it never really was,
My love is beyond compare,
But you don't know,
Because you never cared.

18. Alphabet

Kathleen Jones

I could see you sitting by the window pane
Alphabetizing emotions and storing them away
For a rainy day
Like cans of Campbell's Soup.
You watched me walk up the front steps
Pretending not to see you
Alphabetizing emotions
So you wouldn't have to show them to me.
Even if you did show me how you felt
It would be so orderly
A-Z
Never once stepping out of line.
You resent me for my spontaneity and disorder
My soup cans are empty and astray
I yell and shout at you
If the mood is right or the feeling hits me.
You resent me
I hate Campbell's soup
Your favorite kind is
Alphabet soup with vegetables and stars.
I resent you
You hate me...
And the soup has been spilled
On the floor.

19. Mourning

Janine Passehl

a funeral procession of
unloved lovers
disturbs the cemetery
stillness.
phantoms of relationship's
death
travel slowly
headlights stabbing
darkness
lighting the path to
insanity
where I will bury
my anger in
fresh earth and
mourn the
loss
of love.

20. Letting Go

Mary Frances Lund

Sprouts of green
poke brazenly through the black dirt
kissing the edges of your tombstone.
Onion-skinned bulbs, tenderly earthed
one brisk fall day,
promise saffron trumpets
to wave gaily over stark marble and granite.
Spring's herald, piercing earth
in affirmation of life---
stubborn survivor,
triumphant,
victorious.

I too have survived---
perhaps less triumphant,
less victorious,
yet stubbornly affirming my new life.

21. As Paul approached...

Philip Antinori

As Paul approached the driveway of his white house, he was reflective about the brightness of the night at one o'clock in the morning. The porch light appeared to offer the effect of holding a candle to the midday sun. With the moon waxed at its zenith and the ground covered in a shroud of snow, the glistening had an aura of pretentiousness.

Paul let out a sigh of relief as he stopped in the driveway and turned off the ignition of his automobile. The moment of silence was broken when he said to himself out loud, "Damn! I don't believe I made it through work today. I should have called in sick again." He had slipped and fallen on his back two days ago at work. He had a valid excuse to take several days off, but he had chosen to return after only one day off. His back still ached from the muscle strain.

The struggle to open the car door and get out was accompanied by an assortment of moans and muttered obscenities. He was prepared to confront the usual stealthiness required of a second-shift worker while his family was reposed in nocturnal oblivion. His outside journey to the front steps was slowed by his appreciative gaze at the full moon and a strange optic sensation amid the stillness of the night.

The muted sound haunted him as he quietly opened the front door of his house. He immediately turned around and listened with apprehension for the distant droning of his concern. With slight trepidation, he walked across the street towards the neighbor's garage. As he neared this location, the sound became louder and more distinct.

At first, Paul thought that his neighbor had put some type of heater with an electric fan in their garage. The more logical explanation was that there was a car running inside the garage. From the smell of the exhaust,

Paul had finally deduced the sound that had piqued his curiosity.

Paul perceived the act of running an automobile in a closed garage tantamount to exhausting any human life inside the gaseous confines. He became slightly panicky over the situation, and his immediate thought was to call the police. Instead, he calmly walked back to his house and dialed the neighbor's phone number. He became tense with each ring while he tried to imagine an explanation. He thought that maybe their teenage son was making out with a girl and was stupid enough to leave the car running in a closed garage. At the third ring, he was questioning whether he should have gotten involved in the first place. At the fourth ring, their answering machine was activated. He swore aloud, "Damn."

While Paul was frustrated, his resolve became more determined. He would call the police only after he attempted to awaken his neighbor. Arriving at their front door, he knocked and heard dogs barking. A second knock produced no response, and he began to walk away. He turned around for a final assault, and the door was opened while two large dogs furiously jumped at the slightly ajar storm door. Paul closed the door to keep the dogs at bay.

A woman, who had hurriedly donned a blue housecoat, gazed questionably with startled eyes and unkempt hair. Paul explained, "Jane, I'm sorry to bother you, but I think there is a car left running in your garage!"

"Damn it! It's probably John. He's drunk again," she lamented.

"The garage door is closed and I'm afraid he'll be asphyxiated," Paul exclaimed.

"I'll be right out to take care of him," said Jane.

"Do you need any help?" asked Paul.

"No! I'll take care of things," replied Jane with obvious disdain. Paul was taken aback with Jane's revelation regarding her husband, John. Paul knew that John had been an alcoholic, but it had been several years since he had caused any problems, or it seemed that way to his neighbors. Paul walked back to his house, but he remained at the front door as a guardian of the night. He felt strange as he waited for what he considered a long time for Jane to come out to the garage.

When Jane emerged from her house, she reached the garage and began banging on the large door. No response was forthcoming. Paul was puzzled by this action and walked across the street to assist Jane. He asked, "Don't you have a key that you can use?"

"No!" replied Jane. She added, "He must have both sets of keys with him."

"Is there another way to get in?" asked Paul.

"I could try to slide under the garage door. It does raise several inches," replied Jane.

It was clear to Paul that some form of action needed to be taken as quickly as possible. Paul lifted the heavy garage door several inches off the ground and felt his back pain asserting itself while Jane laid on her back and slid under the door. Their combined effort was successful as she was able to get inside. She groped in the darkness to finally find the switch for the automatic garage door.

From the scene inside the garage, Paul noticed John slumped over the steering wheel with the driver's side door opened and the car idling its intoxicating fumes. Jane reached inside the car, turned off the ignition, and shook John. He awoke in a drunken stupor while Jane glanced at Paul with the look that he was now intruding in a family affair. Paul took this cue and said, "Well, good night."

Paul walked back across the street to his front door and now took the role of a snooping neighbor. He saw John stumble about on his own to the house while Jane kept yelling words that Paul tried to hear but could not perceive. He closed the door on a strange and unsettling episode.

Inside the solitude of his home he

quickly washed up and dressed for bed. As he quietly slipped into bed next to his soundly sleeping spouse, he began to reconstruct the events that had just taken place. He became depressed thinking about how this strange event may have saved a person's life merely by circumstance. On the other hand, he was elated by his reaction to the situation and was anxious to relate his consequential heroism by involvement.

Paul gently awoke his wife to relate his heroic efforts to another being. She was intrigued by the circumstance of events and impressed by her husband's efforts. But she also was dismayed by the lack of appreciation by Jane for her husband's good deed.

The next afternoon Paul's wife saw Jane at the shopping center. They exchanged common courtesies, but there was no mention made of the previous night's odyssey which apparently was a major embarrassment to Jane.

When Paul arrived home that night, he was sensitive to the quiet of the night. He was treated to a pleasant surprise located on the kitchen table. His wife bought him a dozen roses with a card that said he was a real hero in her eyes. Paul smiled at the recognition. Throughout the week the roses remained as buds which refused to show their blooms. Paul eventually discarded them and reflected that their discreetness was as it should be. He oddly said to himself, "I suppose Providence garners the bloom of the rose."

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22. Wendy Oh No No

Chris Bernal

And I'm sure the lady moves
like a locomotive
(grind)
with a steamy engine
dead leopards lying on the track

Pin leg spiders
on her head, webs, salt
mystery and mire
can't escape her thought

let me land
bring
it
in
lust is the greatest love

23. Hearthole

Mary Frances Lund

At first the wound was raw and gaping.
Defenseless,
bitter,
vulnerably exposed,
it screamed his name
and taunted her with shattered dreams.

Slowly, painstakingly
new tissue began to grow
around the jagged hole.
A moment of laughter---
a glimpse of forgotten joy---
the narcotic of time lulled her senses
and mocked her with healing.

A sudden move---
an unsuspected jolt
betrays the mending
and displaces
the scab.

24. Enough is Enough

Kathy Jones

This doesn't seem to hurt as much as before
The bleeding has ended but the wound is still sore
My heartache is mending, the pain fading fast
It's just like they told me - "You know it won't last."
Sure - the pain starts to heal - the hurt goes away
But the scars from this injury will always stay
They're here forever, to show what I've been through
A testimony to the world that I once loved you.

The most painful adventure I'd ever faced
Was learning to love you - "learning my place"
If I stepped out of line, you shoved me back in
Any fights that we had, I knew that you'd win
No flowers or candy were ever given to me
You were unsentimental; you always would be
I had to stand there, empty handed, alone
And wonder what time you were coming home

I'm finally fed up - I guess it's about time
You played with my heart and fooled with my mind
Right now I'm so angry I could tear you apart
For beating me up and wounding my heart
But I'll just walk away and leave you be
So you see how it felt when you did it to me
I know I wasn't crazy for loving you once
But it's time I decided that once was enough.

25. Pictures of You

Janine Passehl

reminiscence

photographs of other times
in the album of my mind

a stab of familiar pain
as each page turns
the world has stopped
        spinning
the sky has turned
        grey
        as has my heart

now and then i laugh
to keep myself from crying

hollow and ringing

piercing the stillness
sharp and hurtful

maniacal

wet come the tears that
will not cease

26. The Immigrants

Mary Juricic

Gino, Maria, and their two daughters, Sandina and Angelina, walked slowly up the dirt road. It was Sunday and they were returning home from church. Normally Gino and Maria would allow the girls to walk ahead and pick wild spring flowers that blossomed alongside the road or enter the cemetery which they passed on the way home. Today the girls were urged to hurry so that they could make it home by noon. The girls wondered why their parents seemed so solemn today. Usually there was jesting and conversation as they would travel back home.

Sandina was disappointed. She looked forward to wandering into the beautifully kept cemetery gardens. There were many artistically carved stones in the old cemetery, and Sandina and her sister liked to examine each one of them. They enjoyed looking at the pictures which were encased in the stones with engraved names dating back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Sandina was especially impressed with the uniquely designed granite and marble mausoleums that housed the more influential deceased persons. Sometimes the mausoleums would be encased partly by glass, and the girls could see the richly adorned caskets. The cemetery was one of historical and significant background.

It took about thirty minutes to reach their home in the scarcely populated village of Canale. The remote mountainous village was located in the northern part of Italy about two hundred miles from Rome.

Life in Canale seemed to have stood still for centuries. The environment had remained untouched by modern progress. The people were very warm and friendly and helped each other whenever there was a need. They farmed the land with oxen and plows. Mules were their beast of burden. Water was carried in jugs from the artesian well in the center of the village. Clothes were washed in the nearby river, and lanterns lighted the house by night. Life was simple, safe, and peaceful. Here the mountains touched the sky, and the flowers danced in the fields.

It was almost lunchtime when the family arrived home. Sandina asked her father if she could go visit her grandmother, Mamaria, who lived about one mile away at the foot of the mountains. He told her that she had to stay home because they had something they had to talk about. Maria asked the girls to change into their everyday smocks while she fixed lunch. In the kitchen, a wooden table was covered with a lovely clean tablecloth, and there was a bowl of apples and dried figs in the center. Maria sliced a large wedge of cheese and homemade bread. Gino gave thanks, and the meal was eaten in silence.

After lunch, Gino brought out a letter and told the girls that it was from their grandfather in America. He asked the girls if they remembered him. Wide-eyed Angelina, who was only five years old, shook her head no. However, seven-year-old Sandina could recall her mother speaking of him in the past. Their father showed them some pictures of him. He was a very proud looking man.

As Gino looked at his daughters, it was hard for him to continue with the news. Slowly he began, "Your grandfather wants us to come to America. Your mother will go first and then we will follow." Their mother tried to explain that since their grandfather was an American citizen, she could be sponsored by him and then she could send for them as soon as she became a citizen. In a few months, they would all be together in America. The girls began to cry. They couldn't understand why their mother wanted to leave them. Sandina sobbed, "I don't want to go to America. I am happy here." Gino tried to console them by telling of the grand opportunity this was. He told them that America was a land of plenty, and there they would have a much better life

than here in the mountains. The girls comforted each other as they crawled in bed that night.

Plans were made for the girls to live with their grandmother, grandfather, and Aunt Nicoletta. Their aunt had never married. She had a deformed leg and couldn't get around very well. Her black stallion Bella would take her where she needed to go. Grandmother Mamaria loved the girls like her own. Sandina would come and visit her many times during the week. Aunt Nicoletta had been trying to teach Sandina how to ride the black stallion and so she looked forward to having the girls come stay with them for awhile.

The expedition papers and passport were soon ready. The girls were comforted with the thought that Mamaria was going to take care of them until they could join their mother. So, on a tear-filled day in April of 1938, Gino and the girls bid Maria farewell. She assured them that soon they would be reunited.

It didn't take long for Sandina and Angelina to adjust to living with their grandparents. Their father would come each evening to have supper with them and visit. He would read the letters received from their mother. She wrote that she missed them very much and that she was studying to become a citizen. One summer evening, Gino came to Mamaria's looking very troubled and depressed. At first the girls thought something had happened to their mother, but he said that she was okay. He then proceeded to show them some papers which he had received from the government. He told them that these were draft papers ordering him to serve in the Italian army. The Italian dictator Mussolini was building a greater fascist army for the impending World War II. Gino was among the men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five who would have to serve.

Once again Sandina and Angelina experienced the sad departure. In America when Maria heard the news, she was devastated. Her plans to reunite her family were now to be delayed. The long hours of hard work on a farm helped her from having a mental breakdown. Each night she would pray for her family.

The weeks and months passed swiftly. The girls enjoyed playing in the barn on the haystacks where all the kittens ran around and the farm animals waited to be petted. They helped Mamaria with the chores of milking the cows and gathering the eggs. Sandina learned to ride Bella, and he became her companion when Nicoletta wasn't needing him. Sandina would gallop him up the mountainside and back to the barn all by herself.

One day, two men dressed in uniform came riding in toward the barn. They stopped, looked around, and dismounted their horses. Sandina was just riding back with Bella when she saw the men. She rode up to the house and called her grandfather. Mamaria and Nicoletta came along also. The men were interested in Bella. They looked at the horse and checked his hooves and teeth. Then they explained that horses were needed for the cavalry forces, and a mandatory order had been given to take any horse which qualified. These were government orders, and they had to comply. Nicoletta stumbled over to them and tried to fight them, screaming and cursing, "Oh no, you are not taking my horse!" Sandina grabbed Bella by the neck and cried. He would be taken by force if necessary, they said. Once again the pangs of grief and loss came upon the family.

After the men had left with Bella, Sandina ran sobbing up the mountainside. She would never see the beloved stallion again. She climbed up into a small cave, and there she cried from the depths of her heart. Her mother was gone, her father was gone, and now Bella was taken away. She sat there for a long time.

It was getting late. Mamaria was call-

ing her, and the echoes could be heard all around the mountainside. Slowly Sandina got up and started down the trail. I still have Mamaria, Angelina, Aunt Nicoletta, and Grandfather, she thought. She walked a little faster and before long, she was running. As she reached the house, there was Mamaria with outstretched arms.

In September, Sandina began her three year compulsory school attendance. There was one teacher who taught in a one room school. There were about fifteen students ranging from ages seven to twelve. The students would learn how to read, write, and do arithmetic. If they wanted further education, they would have to travel to the nearest city school. Most of the students who lived in Canale never went beyond the third grade. Class was held for four hours a day and six months a year. The students were needed to help with the farm work the rest of the year. Discipline was very severe. The student would have to kneel in the corner of the room with a pebble under his or her knee. Sandina was happy to be learning and would come home and try to teach Mamaria and Aunt Nicoletta. They had never gone to school.

It was almost two years since Maria had left for America. She was now a citizen. All the necessary papers were ready for her family. She was counting the days when her husband would be discharged from the service and they could come to America.

In March of 1940, Gino came home looking a bit thinner but well. He was discharged and could now begin making plans to leave for America. It had to be done soon. There was talk that immigration was going to be banned. An emotional and overwhelming reunion was held with friends and neighbors from all around. Then preparations for Gino and the girls to leave began. Mamaria was happy for her son to be joining his wife. However, deep inside she was grieved with the thought of never seeing her grandchildren again. Sandina was not ready to leave her Mamaria. She had no desire to go to America.

On April 7, 1940, after all the tears, embracing, and kissing, Gino, Sandina, and Angelina left on the ship Conte De Savoe for America.

Mamaria died two years later. Grandfather lived to be ninety years old, and Aunt Nicoletta is still living in the house at the foot of the mountains. Sandina has never forgotten her Mamaria. She still keeps looking for her in the eyes of every loving grandmother.

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28. Salvation

Kathy Franke

God in all His glory
Redeems us restless
And ungrateful
Creatures that
He formed on
Earth and called

Friend until we failed to
Obey his simple command which
Resulted in our death.

The ultimate, irreversible punishment
His justice required was
Eternal separation from our Creator.

Love was our salvation as God's
Only Son became for us the necessary
Sacrifice that fulfilled the punishment
Thoroughly, freeing us for eternity.

29. In the Throne

Jim Goebel

In the dungeon
Jewish man of God
Imprisoned for a King.
Crime? Preaching.
Time? Reaching.

Godless dictator
On his throne
Shackling truth.
Crime? Atheism.
Time? Eternity.
Forgivable?
Only he can decide.

30. A Mother's Prayer

Mary Juricic

Dearest Lord,
As I gaze at the portrait of the four beautiful children you so lovingly gave to me, my eyes begin to tear.

They have made a life of their own now and have left my protective arms which had enfolded around them year after year.

How proud I feel - how humble and grateful. O dear Lord how lovely and perfect they are - eyes atwinkling and lips asmiling - each in their own way.

How will they walk through life? Will they be tarnished by the ways of the world? Will they remember thy directions? Please Lord watch over them - guide them and keep them from harm each day.

And, if they do happen to tarnish in areas of weakness - forgive them Lord. Then, may thy Holy Spirit apply the polishing which will make them clean and shiny again.

So, that in that day when you call them back to you again, they shall be just as perfect, good, and acceptable as when you gave them to me - my four treasured gifts from you - three pinks and one blue.

31. A Prime Time

Jim Goebel

The room was anything but inconsequential. Hanging almost everywhere were posters of various heavy metal bands. Posters of Slayer, Kiss, Def Leppard, Metallica, and Megadeth were displayed with pride. On one wall there was, hanging proudly, a gigantic cloth emblazoned with the name and image of Ozzy Osbourne. Situated directly under this homage was a classic brass bed that seemed rudely treated in this room of satanic bliss. Sitting on this bed was Eric, a 25 year old man with long, wire-like blond hair. His facial features were slightly rough but handsome at the same time.

There was a nightstand, again in a classic style, that stood just to the left of the bed. On top of the nightstand was a telephone, and on the shelf below was an alarm clock that seemed like it was consistently seven minutes slow. This usually proved to be no problem to Eric, but it has caused its share of trouble when he had to get up to go to the autoparts store where he worked for five dollars and sixty-five cents an hour.

It was another one of his surprisingly rare late mornings, but this day was different. Eric felt ill, yet not necessarily physically. Eric called his boss.

"Hello, Norton Auto Parts."

"Yeah, Dave? This is Eric."

"Oh, coming in late?" assumed Dave.

"No, I'm just not feeling good today. I can't really explain it."

"Great. I'll just have to call in Jeff, I suppose. You know how he hates to work on his day off."

Eric could hear the slightest anger in Dave's voice. Dave was normally a very relaxed man, but with the increase in business lately, Dave needed all the help he could get.

"Uh.... Sorry Dave," was all that Eric could say.

"Make sure you call in before eight next time. I don't like calling guys in at nine-thirty."

"Okay. Bye."

With that confrontation out of the way, Eric decided to turn on the small thirteen inch television sitting on top of his dresser. Eric really despised his television, because it could only pick up channel 10 on overcast days. Eric started spinning the dial -- Two, three, four, five, all nothing but static. Channel six had some bizarre talk show. From what Eric could gather, the topic was something about former child celebrities to make themselves look more like Alfred E. Neuman. Either that, or the first annual meeting of the Ross Perot look-alike club.

Eric continued up the dial. Seven, eight, nine, and then, channel ten -- the all-religious network.

"...this portion of scripture tells us that God will judge..."

Eric quickly started up the dial again.

"I can't believe they let them put that phony &$%! on!" Eric thought to himself.

After several attempts at entertainment followed by several fights with the rabbit ears, Eric flipped on channel six.

"Well, I might as well watch this swill rather than some hypocritical preacher," he thought.

"So how long have you had this obsession with the movie `Dumbo'?" came the voice from the television.

"Hmm, I was wrong," Eric said to himself.

Eric walked away from his television, down the hall, and into the kitchen in his apartment. On the counter there was a bottle from which he shook out several aspirin. He popped them into his mouth, then he proceeded over to the refrigerator and grabbed a carton of orange juice which he emptied into the largest glass he could find. He drank the entire glass, then went back to his room to get some rest.

When he arrived in his room, he noticed some storm clouds out his window. The odd thing was that there had been clear blue skies outside when he left the room.

"Coming up on the next O'Dennehey: Married couples that get along just fine."

"Must be low on topics," Eric thought to himself.

With that, the television started to lose the signal for channel six.

"Oh great. That means only channel ten is working. No television today," Eric said as he switched the set off.

Eric dropped his ill body onto the bed. As he closed his eyes, he thought, "Preachers. All hypocrites."

"Eric Miscot?" came a familiar, commanding voice.

"Huh? Who said that?"

"I did."

Eric looked over towards the television. There was a man in his early thirties, dressed in a conservative gray suit, holding a Bible, looking straight at him.

"Wha.. How?"

"How doesn't matter. What does matter is where you're going," said the preacher.

"I'm not going anywhere, except to sleep," replied Eric as he pulled his blanket up to cover his head.

"I think not."

With that, the blanket pulled itself off of the bed and flew over to the heavy metal posters, covering them up.

"Hey!"

Now the Ozzy Osbourne tapestry started curling at the edges, eventually rolling itself up like a window shade.

"Don't worry, I didn't destroy anything."

"What's going on?"

"Just creating the proper atmosphere for a good talk. Now, what do you need?" said the preacher.

"What do I need? You're the one who... approached... me... I guess."

"Yes, I did approach you first. So what's up?"

"Why are you asking me? If I can have a conversation with you through... oh boy... my television... you tell me."

"Well, I'll tell you what you need. You need answers, right?"

"Yeah, I suppose so."

"So, what are your questions?"

"Since you seem to know everything, you tell me," said Eric with smugness, still unconvinced this was happening.

"All right," the preacher stated, "I'll tell you. You want to know what God has against you."

"That's a pretty good guess."

"That wasn't a guess. Everyone has had that question at one point in their life. The answer to it is, nothing."

"No answer?"

"No. God has nothing against you. Now the things you do, well that's quite a different story."

"Nothing against me, eh?"

"That's correct."

"So, what am I doing wrong?"

"Nothing," replied the preacher.

"Huh? I'm doing nothing wrong?" asked Eric, puzzled by the response.

"I didn't say you were doing nothing wrong. I said you were doing nothing. That's what's wrong."

"I don't understand."

"I didn't think you would. Turn on channel seven."

Eric got up and proceeded to turn the dial on his television set. Nine, eight, and right past seven to channel six. O'Dennehey was still on.

"He said channel seven!" said the Dumbo-Neuman-Perot look-alikes.

Startled, Eric quickly turned the dial back to channel seven. Slowly the grey, black, and white snow on the screen gave way to a colorful image of a church.

"Do you know what this place is?"

asked the preacher.

"Yeah, that's the First Avenue Church of God. So?"

"Let's go inside and see what's happening," replied the preacher.

The church on television drew closer and closer until the front door of the church was seemingly pressed against the other side of the television screen. After a momentary pause at the door, a hand reached in from off-screen and opened it. Now the television was showing the inside of the church. There was a carpeted aisle down the middle with rows of pews on either side. At the end of the aisle there was an altar with a podium directly behind it. Behind that were several pews for the choir with an old organ to the left. On the back wall was a cross. The preacher's face was in a little box on the lower right corner of the screen.

"And your point?" asked Eric.

"Just wait."

Moments later a young man entered the church. He was dressed conservatively, holding a Bible, and this young man looked just like...

"That's me," said Eric. "But I've never been inside that church. Heck, I've never been inside any church!"

"This is your future," replied the preacher.

"Ha. You'll never catch me inside there."

"Look at what you're doing."

When the preacher said that, Eric's eyes became fixated on the screen. The Eric on television kneeled and started to pray.

"Hey! What the #$!@ am I doing that for?"

"Just watch," the preacher replied.

For the next five minutes, the church on television started to fill with people. Eric finished praying, then stood up and walked behind the podium. Eric sat his Bible down, then proceeded to open it.

"I'm a pastor? Me?"

"Yes, you are... or rather, will be."

"Why should I? Heck, I don't even believe in..."

Eric then looked at the preacher on television and thought about things for a minute.

"Well," Eric continued, "I know something weird is going on here. If I ask if you're talking to me through... man... my television, and you're showing me... my future... is a miracle, let me guess what you'll say."

"Yes," the preacher said, "But I must make you understand the greatest miracle," said the preacher, "Salvation. Do you have a Bible?"

"Uh,no, but I think my roommate does. I'll go get it."

Eric disappeared from his room, then returned moments later.

"Okay, now what?"

"Turn to Romans chapter ten, verse nine."

"Romans... let's see... Ahh, here we are. `That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.' Okay, but why should I want to be saved?'"

"Well, so you won't have to go to hell."

"I'm going to hell. Hell is a non-stop party, man."

"And where did you learn this?"

"From my music!"

"All right, let's turn to Revelation chapter twenty, verse ten."

"Okay. Here, `And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.' Wow. I don't know. You mean my music was lying to me about hell?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well, that verse says that Satan is going there, so I guess I don't have to worry."

"Read verse fifteen."

"'And whosoever was not found written in the Lamb's book of life was cast into the lake of fire.' I don't know if I buy this. I vaguely remember someone saying God is love. If this is true, how could He put someone into a place like that?"

"God doesn't. If you refuse to do what Romans ten, verse nine says, you go there yourself."

"Well, what does all this have to do with my doing nothing?"

"Your doing nothing is what's sending you to hell."

"Huh? Well, I can see your point."

"Good. Are you ready to make a decision for Christ?"

"Well, I don't know. I don't really think that I can change into a better person."

"That's the great thing about salvation. If you confess your sins, give your heart to Christ, and are sincere about it, God will change you!"

"Hmmm. What do I say?"

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner, living apart from you, and going to hell. I ask you now to forgive me of my sins and make me a new creature, complete in You. Send your Holy Spirit down on me. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen."

Eric repeated the words of the preacher and immediately felt his illness lift. His spirit felt peace for the very first time in his life. Eric immediately turned the Bible to Genesis chapter one, verse one, and started to read.

"Praise God" was the last thing the preacher said as his image faded into the static that occupied channel seven.

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32. Family Business

Kathy Franke

Tiny fingers curl around mine in
the tight grasp of a future hero.
Each finger delicately made
and I marveled at their very existence.

The boy grew and his fingers soon
learned how to curl properly
around the handle of a hammer
his father was training him to use.

Soon he joined the family business
and his name was added to the sign.
"Joseph and Son" it read
and all praised his work.

But he had other ideas of what his
destiny was and deserted our family
to "pursue the purpose
for which he had been born."

Quietly, I followed my wonder boy and marveled
as he curled his rough hands around five loaves of bread
and two fish and somehow tore it into
enough food to feed 5000 people.

His magic did not end there and soon
His hands softened with this new profession
as he touched many to heal their sicknesses
and mended their shattered hearts.

Even I believed his teachings because
His hands proved the truth of his words.
"We must silence those hands,"
cried his enemies and they tried.

Those evil men grabbed my boy's hands
and His precious fingers curled in pain
as they pierced them with a spike
while they crucified him for the crime of compassion.

Those hands that I had marveled at so often
now hung on a cross dripping the life out of Him.
It was time for Him to enter His true family's business
and this time the sign read "God and Son."

33. I Am Watching You

Janine Passehl

i am the eyes that
penetrate
the exterior
you have erected,
peering intently into
the fraction
of your soul
left uncovered
by the glossy veneer
you have so
carefully fabricated.
i see your
dreams
hopes and
visions
and know that i
am among them.
i see you watching
and
i know.
yes,
i know.
because you have
allowed me
to see.

34. Passing Thought

Rienna Sills

I feel truly free
when I look into the sea

How the waves pound and crash
so thunderous
and so free

For so long now
how I've wished that were me
so thunderous, so free

35. Speaking My Heart and Mind

Kathy Jones

"Hello... I love you!"
Wouldn't it be a tragedy
If I went up to talk to him, and
My first words were composed of
EXACTLY WHAT I WAS THINKING ABOUT?!?
"I want to bear your children!"
Wouldn't it be sad
If when I opened my mouth
My hormones spoke
For themselves?
"You're incredibly gorgeous!"
Wouldn't it be terrible
If the first compliment I gave him
TOTALLY, TOTALLY
Embarrassed him?
"Take me now, please!"
Wouldn't it be completely uncouth
If I told him what
I REALLY WANT
The first time we met?
"Hey... I really like you. You seem to
have a really great personality, and I love
your smile, too."
Wouldn't it be great...
If I talked to him
At all?

36. As I Lie...

Mark Moore

As I lie on this tiny couch, slightly reclined
against itsback, eyes closed and head downcast,
I am unable to sleep with you beside me.
In the solemnity of darkness, I find my ear
entranced by the slow, steady rhythm
of your breathing.
You rest quietly against me, relaxed as I cannot be
while I listen to the mellow, even timbre
of your every breath.
The soft, cool texture of your hands
hypnotizes my own, as my fingers memorize
the smooth skin of your palm.
In my life I have never known but the label Love
with no substance behind;
now I hope that perhaps I have seen a small slice of the shadow
cast by that enormous ideal.

37. Body Heat

Mary Frances Lund

My soul aches for you
when sleep eludes me.
Ghostly pictures float in the dark,
ignoring my pleas
to return.
Enveloped in goose down,
I feel you curved
along my back,
fitting like the final piece of an intricate puzzle.
I sense the rise and fall of your breathing---

rhythmic, soothing.

Reality abruptly intrudes
when my leg recoils from the chill
on your side of the bed---
when I abandon silk for your chamois shirt---
when I shiver despite flannel sheets and extra blankets.

How many blankets does it take to replace a lover?

38. Friday Night

Shellie Smith

Two shadowy figures were lurking in the parking lot of Louis-Joliet Mall just prior to its closing one winter night. They traveled close beside each other strolling at an easy pace.

"Glad you could join me for dinner," said the one.

"My pleasure," the other responded cordially.

"So what took you so long to get here?" asked the first with a critical edge.

"I went on a side trip with Elvis in a UFO trying to find Jimmy Hoffa," the second responded sarcastically.

"Ha, ha. You're really funny. I can tell you haven't been reading the tabloids lately, or you would know that it's JFK who's supposed to be alive now, dummy."

"Sorry, I only read the headlines while I was in the check-out line in the grocery store, and you know I haven't been grocery shopping in years. So I guess I'm just not as well informed as you are."

The shadows made their way slowly through the icy parking lot. Their outlines were framed by a streetlight for a brief while showing the one individual to be a tall, light haired male with angular features, while the other was a shorter female with long, curly, brown hair and a soft, round face.

"So what do you feel like having tonight? Italian? Mexican?" he suggested.

"No, no," she said." I had Italian last week and Mexican last night. I'm in the mood for just plain old American tonight.

"Okay, sounds easy enough," he agreed.

The pair continued through the parking lot. Only a few cars were left standing in it, most likely belonging to mall employees. They came to a stop at a particularly small and rusty green car sitting far across the park-

ing lot in the dark.

"Ew, yuk. A green Pinto with six Joliet Junior College parking stickers in the back window. How pathetic. This person deserves to die!" she commented.

"It would be a definite mercy killing," he replied.

By then, high-heeled footsteps were clicking across asphalt and crunching over snow toward the green Pinto. The pair crouched down behind the far side of the car as keys were clumsily jingled out of a coat pocket.

The two tensed as they heard a key being fitted in the car door's lock. Heightened senses registered the sound of the woman's heart beating as the two rushed at her. Before she could even think to scream, she was slammed to the pavement with a hand clapped over her mouth. Inches long fangs pierced her neck with an intense flash of pain that caused her to pass out. The shadowed pair lapped at the steaming pool of blood at her throat greedily until their hunger abated.

They rose stronger than they had been before and withdrew their fangs back into pinker gums. She was licking her lips while he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and licked it.

"So what now?" she purred.

"Well, I promised you dinner and a movie. It's still really early. We can catch the next show," he offered.

"You got any money?" she asked as she unlocked the car door and hauled the woman up into the driver's seat. The punctures on her neck had already faded and disappeared. He picked up the woman's purse and rifled through it finding a wallet and stripping it of its cash. He tossed the purse in the back seat and shut the car door.

"Come on, let's go to Movies 8," he said.

"Sounds great," she said, grinning. "I wonder what's playing."

"Who cares?" he shrugged. She took his arm as they walked to the theater.

"You know, we really should go out together more often."

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39. Sapphist

Philip Antinori

I enthrall my love, and she gayly cries.
In love's embrace, our skins begin to rub.
Parting of her lips, kiss between her sighs.

The heat of passion now intensifies.
My tongue gently probes into my cherub.
I enthrall my love, and she gayly cries.

She reciprocates which is no surprise.
We, ardent lovers, grope about for the nub.
Parting of her lips, kiss between her sighs.

Orgasmic delight now ignites our skies.
We have attained the heights through our hubbub.
I enthrall my love, and she gayly cries.

Aglow in the aftermath of love's guise,
We still caress as we share the bathtub.
Parting of her lips, kiss between her sighs.

We are kindred spirits amid lows and highs.
Whet together with the same parts to scrub.
I enthrall my love, and she gayly cries.
Parting of her lips, kiss between her thighs.

40. The Natural Struggle

Kathy Franke

Haunting figures with
Calloused feelings
and taunting memories
demand that I
create a body for them
through my words.
While graceful beings
with treasured joys
struggle to find in me
a voice through which
they can speak.

41. This

Kathy Jones

Is this where you thought you'd be by now?
Wrapped up in your life, yet filled with doubt
Living alone in an unperfect life
No one's sweetheart and no one's wife
Is this where you thought you'd finally be?
Without wedding band and family
With days that just don't end up right
Because you sleep alone at night...
Is this what you thought life had to give?
A life that you sometimes dread to live
No wedding pictures to show off to friends
Only broken hearts that will never mend.
Is this what you thought you'd always do?
In a world where love hasn't come to you
You sit alone feeling incredibly small
Knowing this is not what you wanted at all.

42. Nightfall

Janine Passehl

as the sun
strokes the sky
with the last
golden paints
darkness awakens
rich desires -
instinctive by nature
destructive by choice -
wicked pleasures of
flesh and
        blood
need and
        lust
crying out in
orgiastic
abandon

43. Brace

Philip Antinori

Fred was comfortably sprawled across the living room couch when the doorbell upset his quest to settle the throbbing in his head. In his haste to quell the incessant ringing, he tipped over an empty shot glass which sat precariously at the end of the coffee table. The stale smell of cigarettes and whisky permeated the air while a shaft of light seemed to pierce through his heart as he opened the front door.

"What the hell happened last night? I just got back in town this morning, and Grandma called me and asked me to come to see Mom. I get there and find that Mom's got a black eye, bruised cheek, split lip, and God knows what else! Have you gone crazy? They said you did it to her!"

"Well, good morning to you, too. I suppose I was a little rough with her last night."

"A little rough? What's going on, Dad? You never did anything like this before!"

"That is not exactly the truth, but I called your mom yesterday afternoon, and I told her that I didn't get the promotion to vice-president. They gave the damn job to a kid with no experience, because he was the president's nephew and just graduated from an ivy league college. Anyway, I was damn mad. I told her to stay away and go by my mother's, because I had to talk with Austin Nichols. She was here when I got home. She said, `She wanted to be here for me.' I didn't know what I was doing."

"What do you mean by, `Not exactly the truth'? Have you done this to Mom before without my knowing? Who is Austin Nichols?"

"Austin's name is on the Wild Turkey whisky bottle. I'm not sure if he is a real person or if he is just a cover name like we use in our dunning department, but his bird sure packs a kick."

"Look, Dad, I'm not here to hear some bullshit. I've got plenty of that at home."

"Son, I told you not to marry that dog. She was just a little bitch in heat. You've got to see the light and find yourself a fine Oriental babe like your mother. They know how to treat a man and stay in their place."

"I don't want to get into an argument over your enlightening ideas of the perfect mate, besides you are changing the subject. Anyway, you sure have a strange way of showing your appreciation to Mom."

"Now look here, son, I have made mistakes just like any other man, but I'll be damned if I let them bother me. I warned your mother to stay away from me. You know that I am not an alcoholic. I drink plenty of beer, but once I set my mind to strutting with the Wild Turkey, I'm out to damn well get drunk. Whiskey and me are lights out or someone else's."

"Have you talked with Mom?"

"Yes! She is coming back home some time this evening like I told her."

"Is everything going to be alright?"

"Hell, yes! You know that I am an aggressive son-of-a-bitch and this is just a temporary offensive against me. I talked with Cotter at work, and he told me that most of the staff is on my side. They have ridden on my coattails for years, because they know my drive and ambition can be lethal to my adversary's career."

"I'm glad that you can resolve your work ethics, but I am more concerned with your attitude towards Mom."

"Listen, son, there's no one on earth more devoted to your mother. I spent over two years and a mall fortune to get you and her out of Viet Nam."

"Please don't start with the war stories."

"War stories? Hell, let me talk to you about the other side of the war. Sit down and hand me my cigarettes."

Fred eased down into the recliner and looked like a beached whale as Kim obediently fetched the pack of Camels at the other end of the living room on the end table. They both began the ritual lighting of tobacco as if one was the exact clone of the other. They tamped one end of the cigarette in the palm of their hands, moistened their lips, let them dangle from their lips, reached into their pockets for their respective lighters, and groped for separate ash trays from the coffee table. Fred suggested that they both have a shot of Wild Turkey to get the edge off of his hangover and to settle Kim's nerves which seemed on edge.

"Damn! Dad, this is some potent whiskey. No wonder you got fucked-up yesterday!"

"Son, that's 101 proof of pure Kentucky moonshine. Since you brought up the subject, I got plenty fucked-up in Nam. To be truthful with you, I spent the best years of my life in Viet Nam; that is, not to say that they were wasted, but they were the best. Sure, we had a mission to accomplish, but we played hard and fast. Since you didn't know when you would buy the farm, you lived life on the cutting edge. I was rolling in pussy and piasters while staying drunk or high at the same time. Then again, there was always the thrill of killing Charlie, the enemy. But the best thrill of all was getting inside your mom. Once I got there, I knew where I wanted to ride the rest of my life."

Kim was taken aback by his father's frankness as a ray of light escaped through the day's cloud cover and illuminated a portion of the coffee table. He finished the rest of the whiskey in his shot glass, puffed from his cigarette, and exhaled a big smile as he leaned back on the couch.

"Son, you've known me to be a hard but fair man. I never hit you when you didn't deserve to be hit. It took a lot of guts for you to come over here and confront me. I appreciate your concern, and I am proud to have built that courage in you. We have a lot of things to talk about, but I have to go see a wimp get my job at a meeting this afternoon. I have to get ready."

"Thanks, Dad. I'll give you and Mom a call tonight. Stay sober!"

"You've got my word on that, son." Squinting from the brightness as he opened the front door, Fred was fresh from his grooming with his navy blue pinstripe suit and black wing tips flaunting the air. He smiled approvingly at his 1974 Dodge Monaco. He had two new cars, but this was his other son that he chose to drive to work. It had served him well through the years, and it was built like a tank. Once, a compact car unwittingly rear-ended it in a questionable collision. The police accident report showed no visible damage to the Dodge, yet the other car was totaled and the driver was killed. The Dodge was a safe haven which was as comfortable as a worn-in pair of shoes. The car also brought out the best and the worst in Fred. He treated the interior and the mechanics with loving care, but he avoided maintaining the outward appearance lest people would actually perceive that he gave a damn about this automobile. In its outward appearance of fading paint and minor rust spots, its main strength of arrogance was shown to other drivers. Fred's driving credence was for other drivers to steer away from this rolling fortress of steel.

Checking the time on his digital watch which read 13:00 hours, Fred realized that he would have to hurry to make his 2:00 PM meeting, for it was at least a 45 minute drive to downtown from the far southwestern suburb where he lived. He reveled in the challenge of driving on the expressways of a large city. Turning on the ignition and hearing the revving of an old huge V-8 engine was music to his ears as he pulled out of the driveway.

While driving the local access road to the expressway, Fred spotted a rabbit crossing the road. He steered in its direction and laughed when he heard an approving thump at the rear wheels. He understood his achievement to be a portent of good luck for him.

44. untitled

Chris Bernal

Mystic circles form
in the smoky marsh
mists of myths
congregate in the forest's heart

wrapped in a swarm of seance songs
chants fester in hypnotic mass

spell bound

encased in the warm addiction of loyalty
foaming with self-sacrificial lust
they
Dance
in a holy guise
under severed skies
Dance
to rhythms wise
without human eyes
Dance
in the moon's wet praise
pulsing in a haze
to unite the sect, with a primal hex

45. Modern Music Mindwarp

Jim Goebel

Immorality?
New morality!
Names like
    Slayer
    Poison
    Naughty by Nature
    Public Enemy
And Madonna
Flashing sex.
"Like a Virgin"?
Who knows.
Christian Values?
Old morality;
New bigotry.
eMpTy-V

46. The "W" Word

Mary Frances Lund

Language labels so swiftly.
Son, daughter, brother, sister,
father, mother, husband, wife,
widow.
        Widow's walk,
        widow's peak,
        widow's mite,
        grass widow,
        golf widow,
        merry widow,

        black widow.

Revealing, prying,
like a brand on a deserter's cheek
or a neon sign that blazes "Not Whole"---
threatening women who don't trust their husbands,
inviting men whose egos cry "let me service you"---
eliciting images of gray-haired grandmas
with knitting needles clacking
or Jackie Kennedy under a black veil---
widow.

47. Darkness

Janine Passehl

the subtle flutter
a mere utterance
the city's slumber
disturbed
by silent screams
of telepathic images
and deadly dreams

darkness blankets the town
creeping forward slowly
enveloping all life
in death's shroud

a tantalizing menace
reaches forward blindly
imbued by desire
molested by sin s
anctified in the belief
of an inherent evil that
exists in the souls
of the innocent as

darkness blankets the town

48. D. Koresh

Jim Goebel

God
does
not
stumble
as
often
as
those
who
claim
they're
Him.

49. Disintegration

Joe Mendenhall

let me fall
i implore.

let it end
in brilliant fashion

turned upside down
sea of black discovery

love filled ulcer
hope's marking

so strange and beautiful
the once glistening star

presently desired image

of crushing normalcy

heavenly entity relieve
my lack of all weight.

help me run away with you
call my name from afar

50. The Game

Heather Dubs

She draws the razor blade to her wrist one more time
Hoping this time will be the last
Then the blood trickles onto the linoleum
Quickly creating an egg-shaped puddle
She laughs insanely
As if this is all some sort of game
Her head makes a round trip then limply collapses for the last time
The blade falls onto the happy face patch on her jeans as the
hand that once caressed the blade drops into her lap
The other into the puddle of blood splashing red droplets onto
her T-shirt and jeans
And her eyes slowly lull shut
As she descends deeper and deeper into the nothingness of the
reaper's world
She has played The Game with death
And lost
Only to win

51. Origins

Shellie Smith

What Inspiration
Calls the dancer to perfection?
Muscled prowess, graceful
Flight in motion,
Expression and meaning
In the human form
Balanced
Whole weight
On bruised toes;
Beauty derived from pain.

What Fury
Burns destruction
From human rage?
Makes once-sane people
Rend flesh,
Rip skin,
Break bones,
Bleed,
In battles, in wars, in pain
In continuous cycles.

52. Life Under Glass

Philip Antinori

A strange sign of spring
flies bred between storm windows
never to be free

Child's incubation
Born too soon to survive alone
Flails against nature's truth

Stained glass church windows
Reflecting God's perfect light
Man's kaleidoscope

Peeping through windows
Looking at others for cheap thrills
Unhappy with life's dole

Too small to perceive
Cliched through the microscope
They're larger than life

Mere mirror image
Reflections off the waters
Humans frail vain copy

53. Time for a Change

Kathy Franke

It was finally here. Two and a half years of planning and scheduling. I remember when I thought it would never arrive. But now I was standing on the threshold of the biggest day of my life (so far anyway), and all I wanted to do was crawl into my bed with a good book and fall asleep reading. Instead, I was getting married. I was actually going to walk down an aisle and pledge my life to a man I claimed to love. "Am I ready for this?" I heard myself sigh.

"No one is ever ready," I heard my old friend answer my redundant question. I hadn't realized she was standing behind me. We had known each other since the third grade, but not all those years were spent in the incredible friendship we had now. But I think those years we spent fighting over boys and struggling over who was "better" had forced us to appreciate each other and not take our friendship for granted. No one knew me as well as Julie, not even Bob. But I knew that was going to change now that I was getting married.

Julie continued her thought, "I think marriage is when you actually get to know the person you married. There is no way to be prepared for it. You just have to go into it ready to work at loving each other. Think of it as preparation for..." She paused and then shook her head as she said, "Never mind. Listen to me, I sound like I know what I am talking about. You know I always get carried away with advice--- I'm sorry." She ended her monologue with a short laugh.

"Julie, I'm the one that asked you--- remember?" I replied to her unnecessary apology and then turned so that I could see her, pausing before I admitted, "I'm really scared, Jewels. What if I blow up the oven when I'm trying to cook or iron holes into his shirts? You know that I'm not good at household chores. I can't be a wife. I'm going to be the

biggest failure at this wife-hood stuff." I felt my eyes well up with tears again. Now why was I crying? For two weeks I had been crying about everything. I had even cried during a kleenex commercial. "Look at me," I said, "I don't even have control over my emotions--- great, huh!?"

Julie just stood there looking at me. Her silent stares never bothered me because I knew when she finished analyzing the situation she would offer words of wisdom from her heart and well thought through. But this time she surprised me. I saw tears start to run down her face and watched as she walked over to me, carefully took all the bags and shoe box out of my hands, and dropped them to the floor. Then she wrapped her arms around me and just let me cry my anxieties out. Finally I heard her low voice whisper,

"You will do great. Remember he loves you for who you are, and no one said you have to be `Chef Boy Ardey.'" Her little giggle escaped again, and I laughed too. I pulled away and looked at her.

"Do you really think that I can do it?" I asked.

"Of course," Julie answered. "How many times do I have to tell you, silly? He loves you, and he knows that you are not known for your household abilities. In fact, I remember a time when he made you sign a contract stating that you would not cook him another romantic dinner for three months. I think he feared food poisoning, but he asked you to marry him anyway. He is not looking for a maid--- he wants a loving wife and a wonderful mother for his children..."

"Ok, ok. I get the point," I interrupted. "I just need to be reminded once in a while. That's why I have you around--- you realize that, don't you?" She nodded, and I continued," And just for the record, the contract was only for two months!"

A smile broke across her face. "If it had been me, I would have made it at least two years," and a giggle squeezed out of her. I joined in the laughter and realized that in a way I was saying good-bye to my best friend. I knew she would still be around and that we would get together, but things were changing so quickly. We would be living totally different lives on different schedules.

I bent over to gather up my shoes and the bags Julie had dropped to the floor. We both knew it was time to go to the church but hated to end our closeness.

Finally I said, " Hey Julie, can you grab my dress? It's hanging on the closet door."

"'kay," I heard her mumble, and then a little louder she said, "Hey, let's get this show on the road! What's the hold up?" I smiled to myself as I heard her low voice resound from the bedroom in the 1970's song "Going to the chapel and I'm gonna get married." I joined in, and we created awful harmony. "Some things will never change," I thought to myself and opened the door so she could carry my wedding dress out to the car.

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55. A Letter

Jim Goebel

From: Terry T. Troubador
2435 Anglomaniac Dr.
DoRe, MI 90537

To: International Software
1010 Bitmap Way
From, ME 01101

Dear Sir,

Recently I purchased version V.1.45.65.12.34.13.9E of your integrated software package FirstFast 2 and am having difficulty with the instructions on page nine. Just what do the authors mean by "Ka-boom"?

Yours truly,

Terry T. Troubador

TTT/is

56. A Response

Jim Goebel

International Software
1010 Bitmap Way, From, ME 01101

To: Mr. T.T. Troubador
2534 Anglomaniac Dr.
DoRe, MI 90537

Dear Mr. Troubador,

As per your question regarding page nine of the instruction booklet for version V.1.45.65.12.34.13.9E of FirstFast2(R), we have asked the proper individuals in the programming department and, after heavy sedation along with certain unspecified torture techniques have come up with the following: We haven't the foggiest.

Faithfully,

Sharon l. Gambuloputty,

Senior Envelope Sealer.

SLG/ttt

57. She leaned...

Shellie Smith

She leaned against the street light's post with an arrogant poise. Fried, frizzy rust-colored hair hung in tangled, limp strands while the humid city summer beaded drops of sweat on her skin, making her makeup smear. Occasionally, a slim, pale hand with long, red-polished daggers for nails would slip down her side and tug down the hem of her black spandex micro-miniskirt. The sky had darkened quickly, and the fluorescent light above her flickered and gave off a dull glow as it began to come to life.

She had languished there for over an hour before a large white Cadillac with tinted windows rolled up to her curb. She recognized the car. The darker back windows on her side slid down with an ease only an electric window could have.

"Hey, dollface," called a low, gruff voice from within. "Want to earn a buck?"

"Maybe," she replied, sauntering up to the vehicle on spiked heels. She toyed with the strap of her purse and smiled brazenly. "Just remember, the kinky stuff costs extra."

"Get in," he said. The car door was shoved open, and she found herself perched on the edge of the plush rear seat as the car jerked away from the curb. She was able to get a good look at who she was speaking to then. Across from her, a grossly fat man with thinning brown hair and a twisted nose regarded her with hard eyes. He was wearing an expensive gray business suit and a gold pinky ring with a large diamond in it. The car's driver silently stared straight forward. From where she was, she could see that he was a thin man with dark hair and dark, acne-scarred skin.

"You got a name?" he asked.

"You can call me Red," she said coolly and forced herself to settle back into the seat, smiling.

"Huh, real cute," he said. "You can call me Santa Clause, 'cause tonight's your lucky night. If things go right, this could turn out to be a regular gig for you." He fidgeted with a slim leather briefcase with brass locks as he spoke. It was the expensive kind, a briefcase that only high paid business men and lawyers carried, she thought.

"See, we need a new delivery gal," he continued. "Our last one didn't work out too well."

She snorted at this, and the fat man stiffened. She was well aware of his obvious attempt to intimidate her.

"So why do you need me?" she asked. "Why not get one of your own guys to do it?"

"You're good enough for what I need you to do. No sense in risking one of my own boys on something like this. If you get busted, no loss. You don't know anything, and I can always get this back." He indicated the briefcase. "I got real good connections."

"Besides, you can make an easy three hundred bucks. You obviously need the money. Why else would you have been out so early?"

She smiled, and he clearly felt as though his assumptions were correct. She dropped her eyelids and gave him a devious side-ways glance.

"What if I decide whatever's in there is worth more and book off with it?" she challenged. The fat man sneered.

"Trust me, dollface, you don't even want to think about trying. I'll have you busted up in so many pieces that when, and if, anybody ever finds your sorry ass, they'll need your dental records to identify you." He pulled out a thick cigar and slowly drew off the cellophane wrapper. By the time he got around to lighting the cigar, she had regained her composure.

"Business is business," she responded lamely. "What do I have to do?" She cracked open her purse and carefully slid a lipstick case out.

"We'll drop you off in the area you need to be in. Here's where you want to go," he said and handed her a napkin with an address scrawled on it in pencil. "When you get there, you're to give the briefcase to Joey. No one else, just him."

He paused while she nodded, showing that all of this had sunk in. She popped open the lipstick case and fiddled with reapplying the red makeup, carefully keeping her eyes on the small,

thin mirror in the top of the case.

"After you've dropped off the case, call the number on there. You'll get an answering machine with no message, just a beep. Just say that you've finished with the delivery." He pulled out a money clip thick with bills and peeled off three hundreds. She gawked at the cash with the appropriate level of appreciation as he held it out to her. She gripped the corner of the bills.

"Whatever you do, don't screw up," he said and released the bills. She made them disappear into her thin shirt, tucked securely into her bra. Soon after, the driver was pulling over to the curb again. The fat man reached across her and tugged at the door handle. She saw the driver watching her in the rearview mirror as the door swung open. The slim briefcase was between her and the fat man. She took a firm grasp of its handle and nearly jumped out the door. The car was quick to pull away from where she stood, and suddenly everything seemed so unreal.

The paper napkin was still in her other hand. She just then noticed that she had used a corner of it to fix her lipstick. She didn't remember having done that. Fortunately, the red smears were all on the opposite side of the address and phone number.

The neighborhood she was now in had seen better days. The streets were strewn with garbage and filled with pot-holes. None of the buildings stood taller than five stories and most of them looked as though they had been built before the invention of the elevator. She checked the written address against the nearest building and headed down the street. Her hand was locked onto the briefcase handle like a vise. The spiked heels she was wearing seemed to be louder than anything in the area, and she was perspiring more from nervousness than the heat or humidity. She pictured how she must look walking down this deserted street with a briefcase and laughed lightly to herself with the absurdity of it all. If anyone came across her with the briefcase, she certainly would have a hard time explaining it. Not that anyone from this area would be particularly inclined to listen to her, she thought.

A touch of curiosity tugged at the back of her mind. Briefly she wondered what could be in the briefcase. Important papers used to blackmail someone? Money? Drugs? A gun? There was no way for her to tell. She didn't have any idea how heavy the briefcase was by itself, and she didn't exactly have access to an x-ray machine at the moment.

Eventually, she found the place corresponding to the address she was given. It was a small, dingy liquor store cut into the corner of a brick building. Faded signs advertising special prices blocked out the large glass window at the front while neon signs shaped into the names of various brands of beer glowed above them. The place seemed to be open. She inspected the glass door entrance but found no hours posted. It, like the window, was heavily wallpapered with advertisements. She took a deep breath, gathered her nerve, and tugged open the door.

A small set of bells jingled as she came through. If her heels had sounded loud on the pavement, this was much worse. She forced herself to stand straight and looked over the rows of bottles to where the cash register was. Two men immediately looked up to where she stood. One was old, wearing a greasy, green coat with a yellowed t-shirt under it. His gray hair hung in uncombed strands and gray beard stubble covered his craggy face. The other was a tall, thin man with short, thick black hair, a mustache, and deeply tanned skin.

She walked up and stood with the edge of the last line of shelving between herself and the two men. The briefcase was still in her left hand and remained hidden by the shelved barrier. The older man had stepped to the side as she stopped, while the man with the mustache straightened up and looked right at her.

"Can I help you?" he asked in a level tone with just a trace of some foreign accent.

"I'm looking for Joey," she said. The old man turned his head toward the man in front of her. He nodded.

"I'm Joey," he responded.

She eased out from behind the row of

bottles and moved toward him holding the briefcase behind her. Both men were alert and a bit uneasy.

"I'm supposed to give this to you," she said, looking up at the tall man. She shyly brought the briefcase in front of her and set it on the counter. She was too aware of the way both men were staring at her. She tugged down the hem of her skirt again. The tall man seemed relieved as he pulled the briefcase across the counter top. She edged back as he took his eyes off her to work the brass combination locks. He opened the briefcase and studied its contents while she stared at the leather case's back. The urge to sneak a peek was almost overwhelming, but she kept it in check. Finally, the tall man shut the case with a brisk snap.

"Tell your boss that everything's cool," he said. She nodded in agreement and stalked back toward the liquor store's entrance, her heels clicking across the tile.

She had to walk several blocks before she was able to find a phone. After some time, she was able to locate a gas station with a pay phone off to one side. She reached into her purse and pulled out a calling card.

First, she dialed the number on the napkin. As she had been told, there was an answering machine without any recording. After the tone, she tried to sound as confident as she could.

"I gave the briefcase to Joey. He says to say `everything's cool'," she said, then immediately hung up.

She dialed the next number from memory.

"Fifth precinct, Officer Donnelly," answered a crisp woman's voice.

"Yeah, it's Detective Anderson," she replied. "Get my partner, Russell."

"Hold on," she said. Anderson listened to the clicks as the call was transferred over to her partner's desk.

"Russell," he answered brightly.

"It's me, Matt. I'm going to need to be picked up," she said.

"Where are you, and what the hell have you been doing all night?" he huffed. "I've been trying to get ahold of you since I went on duty."

"Don't worry, I'm fine. My feet are killing me, though. Get your tail out here and pick me up. Take your car, I don't want anyone seeing me hop into a squad."

"Okay, I will, but I want to know what's going on," he said.

"You will," she agreed. "Just as soon as we get off duty, I'm taking you out to dinner."

"Oh, wow. You buying?" he said with feigned awe.

"Sure I am," she said cheerfully. "Now get your tail out here and pick me up before some dense rookie tries to run me in or something."

"O-oh, doing the hooker bit? I get it," he said. "Too bad my car doesn't look like a pimpmobile."

"If you get here fast enough, I'll buy you your own pair of fuzzy dice," Anderson replied and rattled off where she was before hanging up. While she stood to the side of the gas station, she clicked off the tiny, voice-activated tape recorder in her purse.

"Ho, ho, ho. Merry Christmas," she said and giggled as she flipped the spiked heeled shoes off her feet and sat down on an oil display to wait.

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58. Another Letter

Jim Goebel

Colonel Bernard Shaw
1935 East Decimal Drive
West Point, NY 46926

Nathan B. Curtis
1968 Moon Landing
Cape Crusader, NC 15455

Dear Mr. Curtis,

Just a short note to thank you for your generous donation to the Army's "Feed the Hungry" fund. However, we must return (under separate cover) the 4000 pounds of cooked cabbage you sent us. While your intentions were good, the cabbage made the safe deposit box at the bank smell rancid after two days.

Thank you again,

Col. Slawe, U.S. Army

P.S. : Next time, if you must send vegetables, make sure they are in a can.

CBS/nbc

59. Lies

Janine Passehl

you lie
about everything
about nothing
just something
to be lying about

i lie awake
thinking about everything
about nothing
just something
to be thinking about

so i won't think of you
and
your
lies.

60. "Through the Looking Glass"

Lil Pedersen

There's a phrase that goes something like "Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast." When I take a "Magic Carpet Ride" to the door of my favorite get-away-from-it-all place, I enter a world of flashing bright lights and an ever-changing kaleidoscope of colors.

As I walk around my private "Shangri-La," my body is assaulted by different sights, sounds, and smells. The tantalizing aroma of fresh bread and bubbly cheese makes my mouth water and my stomach rumble like a volcano waiting to erupt. As I wolf down a generous helping of a delicious concoction of crunchy bread dough, tangy tomato sauce, creamy melted cheese, and spicy sausage, my eyes scan the surroundings. The multi-colored lights bounce off the walls sending a prism of colors cascading across the room. The bang, whirl, and buzzing of various arcade games adds to the general clamor, and the raised voices of children laughing and screaming in delight fills the room with a sound that echoes from rafter to rafter.

Walking through the arched doorway, I found myself entering yet another dimension, one of pulsating beats and rhythmic sensations. These old-time "Rock and Roll" songs of the 50's and 60's bring back memories of yesteryear and set my feet tapping and my head bobbing. The music eddies back and forth like the crashing waves of a turbulent ocean. My senses start to tingle, and my body sways in time to the throbbing beat of the music as it entices me into the room much like a spider lures an unwary fly into its web.

As I get close to the heart of this vortex of sight and sound, I stop and stand enchanted by the awesome display of animated creatures. Their bodies are covered in soft, tufted fur and each creature wears a colorful outfit. Standing upright, these creatures could easily tower over a child or even a short adult, but their rolling eyes and comic expressions convey the attitude of a friendly and amicable nature. The exaggerated and intense gestures are so lifelike that you could swear they are actually playing the instruments in front of them. Watching them perform this pageant of visual and auditory entertainment, I feel like an innocent child again.

As I enter into this world of fantasy and imagination, I liberate myself from reality and clap and cheer along with the rest of the fascinated children. Singing along with the songs I know by heart and listening and enjoying those I don't fills me with a deep sense of peacefulness and tranquility that I wish I could endure endlessly. The troubles of today and the worries of tomorrow are swept away as the music works its soothing influence on me.

All too soon, the spectacular show is over, and it's time to enter the everyday world again. But I know, like Alice, I will return again soon to my "Wonderland."

61. Ego

Janine Passehl

it may have worked
if you hadn't
been so in love
with yourself and
i had
loved myself
just a little more

62. Stories

Kathy Franke

The rose colored sun was low in the sky as we walked down the pink sand beach and a gentle, saltwater breeze lapped against my face. I relished this special time that we spent together, because it was so seldom and often interrupted. We had just finished an awful week. It seemed that there was no time in the day to talk, and we kept fighting when we did get a chance. But this time that we had set aside special had been peaceful, and I was beginning to forget the frustrations of the past week. Our feet barely sank in the wet, packed sand as we tempted the tide to overtake us. I was so caught up in just experiencing being alive with him that I had forgotten to tell him my news. The sudden memory jolted me into action. Quickly I jetted out in front of him and turned to face him. He stopped when his chest touched mine briefly, and a tingling sensation ran through my being. I took a deep breath and said, "Guess what?" I could feel excitement building up in my face, and I knew he was reading my eyes. There was a puzzled look on his face, and he tilted his head as he questioned back, "What?" I could not constrain my smile any longer, and it exploded across my face as I grabbed his hands. He did not resist, but he still had a doubtful expression on his face. Backing up slightly, I placed my hands on my stomach and stared for a moment at the wedding ring on his finger. I pulled my gaze away and let it travel up his torso until it rested on his eyes. Momentarily, I was troubled that he would not be as happy about the news as I had been, but I knew he would be. He loved kids. Finally I gathered my strength and said..."

"Kelly! Kelly! Can you hear me? Answer me this minute!" I heard someone's scream break through my writing. Bowing my head, I let my eyes rush close and let a sigh out as I backed away from the computer.

"I can hear you!" I yelled back. "What do you want?"

I was so tired of being interrupted. I had been trying for days to finish this story, but everyone had a demand, and no one had patience.

"I need you to come here for a second. We seem to have a problem," the voice on the other end of the staircase responded.

"Okay, just a minute," I said and then asked myself why I didn't just tell them no and make them solve their own problems.

I glanced at the screen and decided I had better save the work I did accomplish this afternoon and quickly typed the correct saving procedure. Then rising to my feet, I stretched my arms while arching my back. I wondered how long I had been sitting there. Probably about 45 minutes, not very long for someone who was trying to write a novel.

I started my descent down the patched up ladder that led to the attic where I did all my work. The attic was cold and cluttered with boxes, but it was away from all the noise. Somehow that did not seem to matter any more, as the noise always found its way back to me. Being the oldest in what society calls a dysfunctional home was a full time job with no awards. I never got credit for what I did. It was either given to our mother or to some stupid social worker who was trying to help us.

I had stepped off the ladder into a closet and pushed open the heavy door to the twins' room. The light were out, and the sun had gone down. It took a minute for my eyes to adjust, and I looked around the familiar room. We didn't have much money, and the furniture was beat up, but it was the best we could do. The girls were no longer here, but I knew they had been. Otherwise, I would have never heard them. I walked out into the hall that led to my mother's room and the staircase. I could hear some commotion downstairs and wondered what the problem could possibly be this time. I thought I had already solved all the worlds' possible problems for these girls. I trudged down the stairs, in no hurry to get involved in another sister fight. The stairs squeaked under my feet, and one of the twins ran into the living room, which the stairs descended into, and looked up at me. Her green eyes were wild with fury, and she screamed as she neared

me, "What's taking you so long? I have a major problem, and we need your help, and you're taking your time. What if one of us was dying or choking or something, and you took this long to get to us. We would be dead before you got to us, and then wouldn't you feel guilty!" Her eyes were flashing her accusation, and I began to laugh which only fueled her anger. She was so dramatic. You would think that the house was on fire by the way she was carrying on, but it was more probable that the drain in the sink was clogged.

"Shut up!" she screamed as I passed by her and called out "Millie." The other twin answered from the kitchen, her voice calm and smooth. Although the 14 year old twins were identical, their temperaments were opposite. Millie was a mild teen. She was happy if you gave her a book and let her read. Nothing seemed to upset her, and yet she was spineless. She always followed along with her friends. That scared me often, especially since her sister was a troublemaker and was often getting them into big messes. Missy had a lot of spirit and was extremely spontaneous which made her popular, but she was also very selfish, and I often found myself furious with her.

I walked through the swinging bar doors into our bright kitchen. I would have laughed at the sight before me if I had not been so shocked. There stood Millie with her thick, long, red hair hanging in her face, but the ends of it were died a shoe-polish black. So this is the major catastrophe, I thought to myself as I approached Millie.

"Missy," I said, "did you do this to your sister?"

I turned to look at her. She put her hands on her hip and said matter of factly, "You can't blame even me if it didn't work. I followed the directions, but the color didn't seem to take in the top part of her hair."

I shook my head and asked, "Why on earth were you trying to change her hair color?" I whipped around to Millie and asked, "Why on earth would you let her do something like this to your hair?"

Sighing, I rubbed my hand across my face. That was what my mother always did when she was not sure what to do next. I did not expect the girls to answer, but I should have known that Missy would.

"We were tired of looking alike and decided it would be better for our reputation if one of us had black hair, and Millie said she had always wanted black hair, so..."

"Okay, whatever. I know you probably pushed her into something she didn't want to do in the first place," I replied, and Missy's defenses went up.

"I did not," she said. "How was I to know that it wasn't going to work? Besides, she told me herself that she wanted me to do it."

"Oh, sure she did," I accused, then turned to Millie and asked, "Did you really ask Missy to do this to your hair?"

She shrugged and looked at the floor as she said, "I didn't know it would turn out like this." I had a feeling that she was protecting her twin, and I hated that. If the tables had been turned, Missy would have buried Millie for messing up her hair, and here Millie was taking partial responsibility.

"Well, I don't know what to do," I said. "If it won't wash out, then I guess the best thing to do is to wait a couple weeks and then dye it back to red. If you guys really don't want to look alike, why don't you just get your hair cut?"

I turned to leave the room, satisfied that I had done all I could, and then as an afterthought added, "Millie, don't you dare let Missy cut your hair!" Missy looked offended, and Millie just nodded.

"A lot of help you were!" Missy screamed at my back as I walked out.

"Shut up," I yelled back as the phone rang.

Missy dashed out of the bar doors and ran ahead of me to the phone which was on the stand next to the couch in our living room.
"Hello," she said in her fake voice. I figured she was trying to sound older and more sophisticated. "Oh hi, Mom," she then said in a normal voice. "Yeah, just a minute."

"It's Mom, and it's for you." She turned to

me and handed me the phone. Grabbing the receiver, I dreaded what the woman on the other end was going to say.

"Hi, dear," Mom started. Missy was a lot like our mother. They were very high strung people, and I could hear the stress in her voice.

"Hi," I replied.

"I bet you know why I called," she continued. "I am going to have to work late again tonight, so the girls are your responsibility. Make sure you fix them something to eat, and don't forget to do the dishes. If you could, I also need the wash done, so take some time this evening to do that as well."

I was so frustrated. "Mom, it's already 7:30. Why didn't you call earlier if you were going to be so late. There is nothing to fix for dinner, and I have to get my writing done before tomorrow. I can't get the wash done at the same time. Can't Missy and Millie do it?"

She sounded angry as she answered, "Don't you dare be so ungrateful after all I have done for you all these eighteen years. Young lady, your sisters have homework to finish, and then they are to go to bed. There is no reason why you cannot help out around the house once in awhile, and I expect the work to be done when I get home."

"But that isn't fair," I whined back, "they are only four years younger than me. I don't understand how come you never come home or why I keep getting stuck with all the housework. You know that my writing is important to me and that I have a deadline."

I had made her really mad, but I didn't even care anymore. Her voice sounded strained as it came back to me.

"You will never complain like this again to me. You have no right to talk back to me, and as far as the stupid writing you spend all your time doing, it's a waste of time. I have read some of your stuff and it sucks, so you might as well just let it go. There is no reason why you should have a deadline, because you don't have a publisher. Therefore, you just lied to me, and I'm tired of talking to you about this. Go do your work like you are supposed to and give me a break. You owe it to me." Then she hung up.

I stood trembling with the phone still plastered to my ear. How could my own mother tell me that I suck. I thought mothers were supposed to support you no matter what. She was right—I had lied to her about the deadline, but I thought if I said I had one maybe she would let me have time to work on this novel. As it was now, she would make sure I could not work on it for about a month. She always punished me like that. She would create all this work for me to do and then make me do it alone. I guess you could say I was a modern day Cinderella. I should write a story about this someday, but for now....

"Lisa, hey Lisa! Are you up there?" I heard someone break through my concentration.

"What do you want?" I yelled back.

The reply came back muffled. "Just want to say that I'm home," he said.

I smiled to myself and thought what a relief it was to have a loving husband. He was always encouraging me to do what made me happy and had no objection to me writing. I stood up, stretching, and stepped out of my library into the hallway. Watching him bound up the stairs with a rose in his teeth and champagne and glasses in his hands forced a giggle out of me, and I laughed in delight as he swept passed me into our bedroom. He placed the glasses and champagne on the cedar chest at the end of the bed and then made his way to me, placing his hands on my waist. He began to sway to the music that constantly ran through his head. I followed his lead and reached for my flower. Taking it from his mouth, I smiled at his sparkling eyes.

"Thank you, lover," I said in a fake sugar sweet voice, and he responded trying to sound very masculine, "my pleasure, madam."

"Did you miss me today?" he continued, and I smiled at the word games we played every day. He knew what my response was going to be, but it was a ritual now, and our day seemed empty without those word exchanges.

"Not a moment went by that I wasn't thinking of you," came my response, and it was

whispered into his ear, "I've got a secret."

A smile graced his mouth and he responded as always, "What's your secret?", his lips brushing my ear.

I shivered, and he pulled me closer as I shut my eyes and rested my head on his shoulder. There was a moment of silence as I remembered back to the days when we started this. Usually, I would tell him my secret was that I loved him. Today it was different, yet in a way it was basically saying the same thing. I stood up on tiptoes again and breathed the words into his ear, "You are going to be a daddy!"

He stopped swaying and took a deep breath. He made no reply but picked me up off the ground in a tight embrace and spun me in circles. I knew he was as happy as I was with the news, and tears filled my eyes as he yelled out, "I love you, Lisa Marie Sullivan!"

Momentarily I thought back to my story, my past, and buried my face deeper into his shoulder, knowing that I was finally completely protected and loved. Slowly he began to sway again to that tune that always runs through his head.

63. Highway Haiku

Shellie Smith

The passing of air,
Over sleek glass and metal;
River of machines.

64. The Loon

Martha Sayles

To figure if a Loon's a duck or just a bird
The dictionary must be heard.
It seems to be that you're in luck.
The Loon's a bird and not a duck.

LOON-(lōōn) n. Any of several diving birds of the genus Gavia, of Northern regions, having a laughlike cry. Large swimming birds with daggerlike bills.

DUCK-(dŭk) n. Any of various wild or domesticated aquatic birds of the family Anatidae, characteristically having having a broad, flat bill, short legs, and webbed feet.

65. Lessons in Acting

Kathy Jones

Say the line again. If you were born
to be a mouse, would you be like this
today? Breathe the life, walk the life...
ACT the life of your character.

Say the line again. Let it ooze out
of your being and spill over, running
slowly over you like honey. Let the
sonnets of Shakespeare drip from your
tongue like molasses ona hot summer
day.

Say the line again. If to be a giant,
walk tall. If to be a mouse, think small.
Pull on the sandals of Caesar, unsheath
the dagger of Macbeth, sound out in the
insanity of Hamlet. How would you feel
to be one of these? Cry, scream... hate,
love... murder... BE.

Say the line again. What feeling do you
seek? What emotion do you feel? Are you
confused? Cry out from the desperation of
your soul; weep from the dark corners of
fear in your mind. Sob in anguish for a
weary world... be silent and let your actions
speak a thousand, brilliant words.

Now,
say the line again.

66. Think

Janine Passehl

slowly but surely
pushing and prodding
thoughts racing
intellect shuddering
whirling
pulsing
the effects are dizzying-

masturbation of the mind

67. Black Gold

Mary Frances Lund

My one besetting sin, this addiction---
hot and steamy, gently lightened,
teasing my nostrils,
demanding to be satiated.

At the mall, Gloria Jean's refuses to be ignored,
tempting me with Chocolate Raspberry,
Macadamia Nut, Irish Creme,
each ready for my shiny red grinder---
while in the refrigerator a can of Luzianne
befriends a bag of Papanicholas' Hawaiian Kona,
and on the shelf lies buried
a jar of Taster's Choice---
all leaded, no-lead won't do.

In the end it matters not what flavor,
grind, or blend---
only that the monster be fed.

68. Star Gazer

Larry Hartding

I can see three men standing on a hill as black clouds race overhead. On one side of the hill lies humanity and on the other side, destiny.

In my mind's eye I can see the three men die. They read my mind and through their thoughts see their mortality.

The first of the three is dressed in white. He has been appointed to choose a person to lead mankind over the hill. He sees me but does not select me because of my gift of sight. He is the only one of the three that doesn't hold contempt for me.

The second man is dressed in black and red. He is a man only in the barest aspect of the word. He sees me at the foot of the hill and curses me. He has vowed to make mankind share his fate of never meeting with destiny.

The third man is swathed in rags. He is too old to stand and therefore must sit. He cannot see anymore but has no need. He is the one who holds the right of passage to the hill. I am no longer sure of his intentions as I was in the past. He sees mankind's struggle with the two men on the hill. In the past, the man in black let the old man only see his victories. Only let him see the murder, the racism, and the hate. The man in white knew of this but did nothing at the time. But then, over the course of time, the old man's vision failed. The man in white taught the old man how to see with his heart and soul---to have vision that transcended physical sight.

The old man still saw the dark blanket of hatred that had cloaked his view of mankind in the past. But then, a point of light appeared. As the old man looked into the light with his new sight, he saw a man barely alive, lying on the ground. He was badly burned and bruised.

The old man sighed at the familiar sight of one man dying at the hands of another. The man in white bade him to keep watching.

The man on the ground was trying to get up. As he got to his knees, a large group of men came rushing toward him. The old man sighed at the thought of the mob and again looked away.

Once again, the man in white bade him to keep watching what was going on. Irritably, the old man looked back into the light. Two men from the crowd grabbed the arms of the man and lifted him to his feet to reveal a small child beneath him. It was a little girl clutching a stuffed toy. A burning building came into view as the old man's vision became clearer.

Just before he looked away from the light, the old man heard the severely burned man utter in a detached voice, "Did I save her.....?"

Then another point of light appeared. This one was of a doctor saving a newborn infant that was born prematurely. Then even more began to shine. A priest was feeding a homeless woman.

Soon the dark veil was covered with glittering specs of light. Some were more intense than others, but all were important.

The starry night that I gaze upon as I write this is a promise. A promise that no matter how dark and vast this world may be, there is always something to cling to behind the clouds of uncertainty.

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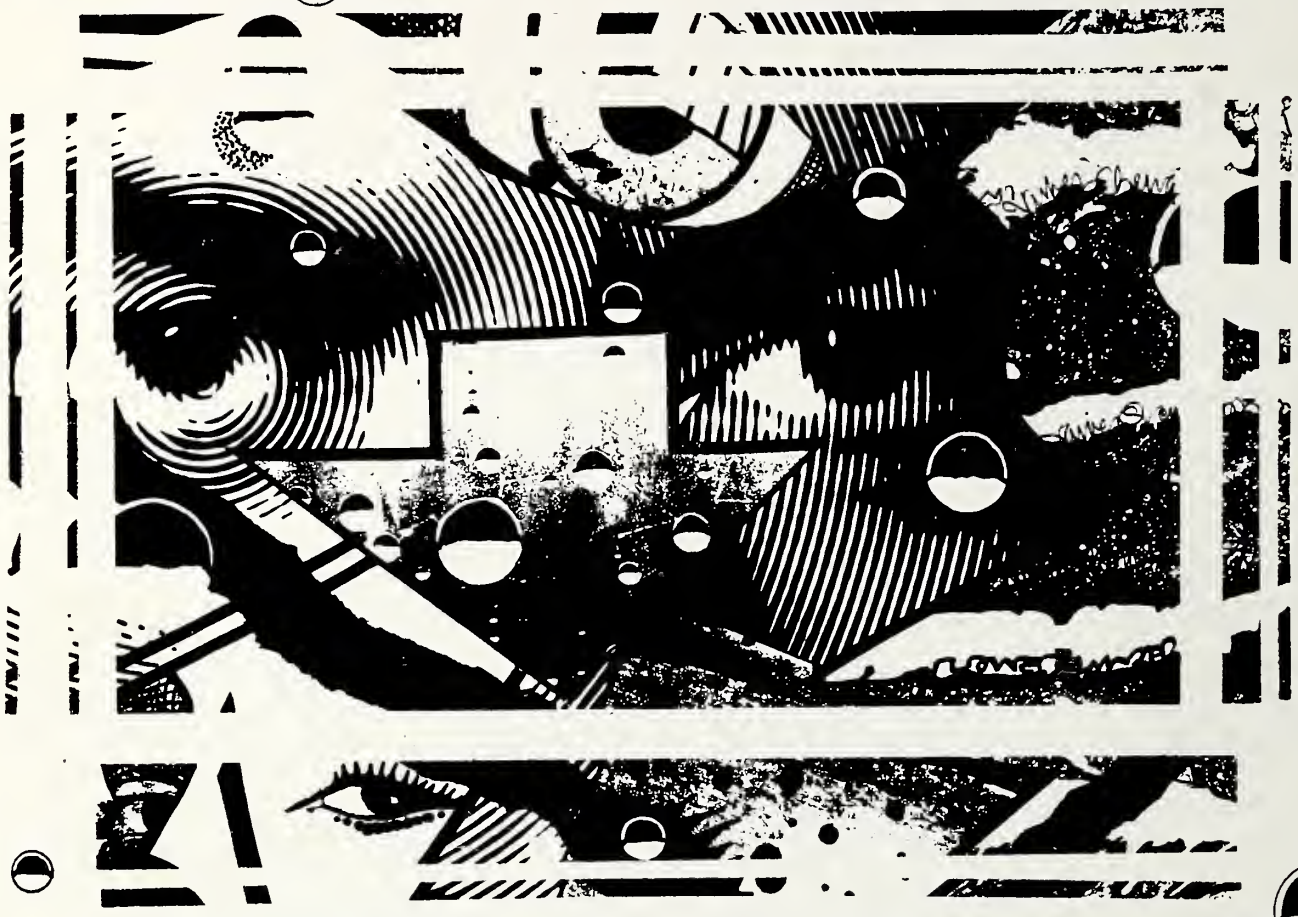

WORLD EATER

84